

No. 44

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ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

JACK LIGHTFOOT'S DUCK BLIND

OR A STRANGE MYSTERY OF THE SWAMP



Brant or goose, it mattered little, since at the double discharge of Jack's faithful old ten-bore the pilgrim of the upper air took a tumble.

Publishers' Note. "Teach the American boy how to become an athlete, and lay the foundation for a Constitution greater than that of the United States."—Wise sayings from "Tip Top." There has never been a time when the boys of this great country took so keen an interest in all manly and health-giving sports as they do to-day. As proof of this witness the record-breaking throngs that attend college struggles on the gridiron, as well as athletic and baseball games, and other tests of endurance and skill. In a multitude of other channels this love for the "life strenuous" is making itself manifest, so that, as a nation, we are rapidly forging to the front as seekers of honest sport. Recognizing this "handwriting on the wall," we have concluded that the time has arrived to give this vast army of young enthusiasts a publication devoted exclusively to invigorating out-door life. We feel we are justified in anticipating a warm response from our sturdy American boys, who are sure to revel in the stirring phases of sport and adventure, through which our characters pass from week to week.

ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY

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No. 44.

NEW YORK, December 9, 1905.

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JACK LIGHTFOOT'S DUCK BLIND;

OR,

A Strange Mystery of the Swamp.

By MAURICE STEVENS.

CHARACTERS IN THIS STORY.

Jack Lightfoot, the best all-round athlete in Cranford or vicinity, a lad clear of eye, clean of speech, and, after he had conquered a few of his faults, possessed of a faculty for *doing things* while others were talking, that by degrees caused him to be looked upon as the natural leader in all the sports Young America delights in—a boy who in learning to conquer himself put the power into his hands to wrest victory from others.

Tom Lightfoot, Jack's cousin, and sometimes his rival; though their striving for the mastery was always of the friendly, generous kind. Tom was called the "Book-Worm" by his fellows, on account of his love for studying such secrets of nature as practical observers have discovered and published; so that he possessed a fund of general knowledge calculated to prove useful when his wandering spirit took him abroad into strange lands.

Lafe Lampton, a big, hulking chap, with an ever present craving for something to eat. Lafe always had his appetite along, and proved a staunch friend of our hero through thick and thin.

Phil Kirtland, a rival of Jack's, but who was not averse to winning a little glory at times, even if he had to share it with Lightfoot.

Katie Strawn and **Nellie Conner**, two Cranford girls, friends of Jack.

Brodie Strawn, one of the Cranford boys who of late had begun to understand Jack, and at the same time admire him.

Bill Dillon, **Jim Wagstair**, a couple of vagabonds who caused our young duck hunters considerable trouble.

Professor Sampson, a queer old naturalist, and a teacher in Cranford.

Kennedy, the plucky town constable.

CHAPTER I.

THE GUNNING SKIFF.

Bang!

The loud report of a fowling-piece in the hands of a youthful sportsman rang out upon the crisp air of the late November afternoon.

The sportsman was Jack Lightfoot, the leading all-around athlete of the town of Cranford, and the gun had been aimed at the side wall of an old building.

As the smoke cleared Jack ran to the side of the building, from which he had been standing some fifty yards away, and he now began to examine the results of his shot.

The weather-beaten boards, over a circular space fully a yard in diameter, were pitted deeply with the tiny pellets of lead, and a look of satisfaction quickly lighted Jack's handsome, healthful face.

"That's very good work, old twelve-bore," he said to himself, fondly patting the stock of the double-barreled

gun. "If you carry as strong as that over fifty yards, I can see trouble brewing for the ducks and geese up around Hickman's swamp."

His favorable mental comments were at that point interrupted, however, by a shout from the direction of the street, and Jack turned quickly and saw Brodie Strawn, one of the academy boys, waving his hand from outside the front fence.

"Come over!" shouted Jack, returning the friendly salutation. "Come over and join me."

Brodie evidently needed no second invitation, for he quickly vaulted the fence and crossed the grounds between them, joining Lightfoot at the side of the building.

"What are you doing, Jack?" he asked, surveying the gun with much interest. "You're not thinking of shooting yourself, are you?"

"Not so you'd notice it, Brodie," replied Jack, laughing.

"I heard the report, so I ran down here to see what you were firing at."

"I was only trying the gun, Brodie."

"Trying it?"

"To see how strong it carries, and also how much it scatters, at a range of fifty yards," explained Jack, pointing to the side of the building.

"Is that where the charge struck?"

"Yes."

"Gee! but she peppered it good," cried Brodie, now also examining the pitted boards. "At fifty yards, did you say?"

"The distance was greater, if anything," replied Jack. "I was out beyond that tree over there."

"Sure! That's more than fifty yards."

"I knew the gun pretty well before," added Jack; "and what it would do against small birds. But I now intend going for bigger game, so I wanted to see how the gun would carry a charge of duck shot."

"It scattered all right, Jack, for a half-choke left barrel, and had plenty of power," said Brodie. "That's evident enough."

"Yes, so it did," nodded Lightfoot, throwing open the gun's breech and expelling the empty shell. "If there had been a duck, a brant or even a goose, Brodie, within the circle of those shots, I could easily see his finish."

"That's right, too," assented Strawn.

Then he turned about again and looked at Jack with inquiring eyes.

"Going after bigger game, did you say?" he asked.

"That's what, Brodie."

"What kind of game?"

"Ducks," replied Jack. "It's coming colder weather now, and they are beginning to fly south. They are said to be quite plenty up around Hickman's swamp just now, and I'm going up for a try at them."

"That's a wild place up there."

"I don't mind that, for it's all the better," said Jack. "Lafe Lampton and I have been up there twice this week, and we have built a duck blind that ought to enable us to do good business."

"Is Lafe going with you?"

"Yes."

"Who else?"

"Nobody on the first trip, Brodie. We first wish to learn what there is in it."

"Seems to me, Jack, you've been mighty secret about it," grumbled Brodie, a bit put out. "This is the first I've heard of it."

"Oh, there has been no secret about it, though we have not been giving ourselves away much," Jack hastened to explain. "You see, Brodie, if everybody knew that the wild fowl had struck in up there, no end of gunners would be out after them and soon would frighten them away."

"That's right enough."

"So Lafe and I have made our preparations quietly, but not with a design to conceal anything from our friends."

"I see what you mean," nodded Strawn, somewhat appeased by the explanation.

Hickman's swamp, the locality mentioned, was an extensive section of wet, wooded land some six miles from Cranford town. It made the beginning of a long stretch of woods off to the east of Highland, one of the neighboring towns, and the country up in that section was, as Brodie Strawn had remarked, a very wild one.

There were scarcely any houses for some miles around, while the swamp itself was an entirely deserted wilderness, abounding with small ponds and shallow creeks, some of them connected by narrow strips of low water, all bordered thickly with tall bullrushes, shrubs and coarse grasses.

The entire section comprising the swamp was, in fact, a lonely, dismal and wild place enough, and one into the depths of which few persons would have cared to penetrate.

Such an expedition as that planned, however, just suited Jack Lightfoot, whose venturesome spirit was not easily daunted, and whose nerve and courage were equal to much more hazardous undertakings than this.

Jack was, moreover, a crack shot both with a gun and revolver, and he stood in no awe of anything in the line of man or beast that Hickman's swamp was likely to produce.

Yet Jack was, though wholly unaware of it at the time, destined to meet with some very startling and stirring adventures, entirely out of the line with the sport he and Lafe Lampton were about to seek.

"When are you and Lafe going up to the swamp?" Brodie Strawn presently asked, still a bit down in the mouth because he had not been included in the expedition.

Jack Lightfoot noticed this and he again attempted to appease him, it being second nature in Jack to seek only the good will of the other boys.

"We are not going up there for business till Thursday, Brodie, there being no school the last three days of this week," said he. "If we find any sport, there will be plenty of chances for you and some of the other fellows to go up with us a little later. I'll keep you posted, I give you my word for that."

"That's fair enough, Jack."

"I always mean to be fair, Brodie, you know that."

"You're right, Jack, I do," Strawn now warmly rejoined. "You and Lafe are not going to stay at the swamp nights, are you?"

"No, indeed."

"That wouldn't be quite safe."

"My mother would object to that," added Jack, with habitual loyalty to his home duties. "We shall start at daybreak, Brodie, and return with our bag of game in the afternoon."

"If you bring down any," laughed Strawn.

"Oh, we'll bag something, all right," Jack confidently declared, little dreaming what sort of game fate had in view for him to bag. "You've not yet seen the skiff I made, have you?"

"What skiff is that, Jack?"

"A gunning skiff I have just completed."

"Whew! you always see to it that everything necessary is provided," cried Brodie, admiringly. "I never knew your like, Jack."

"I have built it at odd times," returned Lightfoot; "when not engaged with my studies, or with other sports."

"I have wondered more than once what you were up to, Jack, when I didn't see you around. Where is the gunning skiff?"

"Out in the shed, Brodie. Come and have a look at her."

Jack led the way across the grounds to the building

mentioned, the broad door of which he unlocked and opened.

A quick cry of admiration came from Brodie Strawn.

Raised upon rollers upon the floor was the gunning skiff Jack had built, the sight of which so had pleased his companion.

It was about ten feet long. Though square at each end, both had been carefully tapered somewhat, giving the sides a graceful curve and the skiff as a whole a very symmetrical appearance.

"Gee! but she's a corker, Jack," exclaimed Brodie, surveying with a critical eye the light skiff.

"She's all right, Brodie, for what we want of her," replied Jack, placing his fowling-piece on a workbench at one side. "Take hold, Brodie, and see how light she is."

"Gosh! she's as light as a feather."

"Pretty nearly," laughed Jack. "I've built her as light as possible, so she may be easily carried by two of us. Up in that blooming swamp it's often necessary to get from one pond to another over some strip of land, in which case the boat must be lifted over."

"I see," nodded Strawn. "Two could carry that skiff a half mile, if necessary, she's so light."

"That's what I planned for," nodded Jack.

"Wouldn't she be better if you had made the bow sharper?"

"No, not so."

"How's that?"

"It would have given a gunner less room to work in," explained Jack. "Now, you see, he has plenty of space to crouch down in, and can handle his gun to much better advantage."

"That's right, too," admitted Brodie, nodding approvingly. "But you could have got more speed out of her, Jack, if you had built her with a round bottom instead of a flat one."

"I'm not looking for speed," laughed Jack. "Room and stability were what I chiefly wanted."

"I see."

"Besides, the water in the swamp ponds and creeks is often very shallow, and a flat-bottom boat can be used to much better advantage," Jack went on to explain. "We can go anywhere we like in this one, Brodie, for she'll not draw more than four or five inches loaded."

"You're right again, Jack," assented his companion. "You always seem to consider all the requirements, no matter what you undertake."

"Well, there's always two ways of doing a thing, a right and a wrong way," laughed Lightfoot. "I always

make it a point to try, at least, to hit upon the right way."

"And you most always succeed, too," said Strawn, now walking about the light skiff and surveying her from the aft end. "She'd have been prettier, Jack if you had painted her white, instead of that dull green color."

Jack Lightfoot laughed again and shook his head.

"Prettier, Brodie, perhaps, but not so practical," said he. "A white skiff would be too easily seen by birds flying over, and it would tend to keep them at a distance."

"So it would, Jack."

"I have painted her nearly the color of the swamp grasses and foliage along the edge of the ponds."

"So she'll not attract attention?"

"Certainly," nodded Jack. "It now will be very easy to conceal her among the grasses and bullrushes, and we then can get a good crack at flying birds before we are noticed."

"I see the point," said Brodie, with much approval.

Then he suddenly exclaimed, bending nearer the stern:

"Why, what's this, Jack? You have named her—Kate!"

He was examining the name neatly painted in white letters on the stern of the skiff.

A wave of color rose over Jack Lightfoot's attractive face when Brodie spoke thus and looked quickly up at him.

"Yes," he rejoined, simply.

"You haven't named her for my sister Kate, have you?"

"Well, yes, I thought I would," smiled Jack. "I don't think she will object, Brodie, will she?"

"Object—well, I should say not!"

And Strawn suddenly sprang up and held out his hand, adding quickly, with much feeling:

"She'll be more than pleased with the compliment, Jack, and so am I, too."

"Well, I'm glad of that, Brodie," said Jack, returning the hand pressure.

"You're all right, Jack, and the skiff is worthy its maker, and worthy the name of the girl," cried Strawn, heartily. "And I'm blessed, Jack, if I'm not ashamed of myself for having shown any feeling over not having been let into this business before. There is one sure thing, Jack, and that is that you can always bank on my loyal friendship."

Jack Lightfoot colored a little deeper and thanked him warmly.

As a matter of fact, Jack not only was very fond of Brodie Strawn's pretty sister, but it was Jack's invariable policy to insure, also, by such thoughtful acts as this, the kindly regard of all of his associates.

CHAPTER II.

THE RIDE TO THE SWAMP.

It was late Tuesday afternoon when Jack Lightfoot had his talk with Brodie Strawn about the gunning skiff, and the latter told his sister all about it when he reached home at supper time that evening.

As he had remarked in the afternoon, Kate Strawn was more than pleased with the compliment paid her, and her face flushed and her pretty eyes grew brighter when she heard about it.

"It is very kind of Jack to name the boat for me, and I hope it will bring him no end of good luck," she gleefully exclaimed.

"Jack Lightfoot doesn't need any luck," laughed Brodie. "He has so much foresight, and takes such care to head off every possible difficulty, that the element of luck doesn't cut much ice with him."

"He is a very smart fellow and as good and brave as he is clever," declared Kate, with open admiration. "No better example is set by any of the Cranford boys, than that set by Jack Lightfoot."

"That's right, too," Brodie frankly admitted.

The pleasure derived by Kate Strawn, moreover, was further increased the following day.

This was on Wednesday, the half holiday, and at noon that day the Cranford schools and the academy closed for the rest of the week.

It was during this short vacation that Jack and Lafe Lampton had planned to make the several daily expeditions to Hickman's swamp after wild fowl.

Soon after noon that day, just as Kate Strawn had finished her dinner, she answered a ring at the front door and discovered Jack Lightfoot standing on the steps, at which her countenance lighted with pleasure.

"Oh, is it you, Jack?" she exclaimed.

"Most of me, Kate," laughed Jack.

"Will you come in? I have been hoping to see you, so that I could thank you for naming your new boat for me."

"It is I who should do the thanking, Kate, for the privilege of using your name, which I took without the asking," smiled Jack, blushing slightly.

"I'm very glad you did."

"Are you?"

"Surely you knew I would have consented to it. I feel much complimented."

"That's all right, then," rejoined Jack. "And perhaps you'd enjoy riding up to the swamp with us this afternoon, to see us put the boat into the water."

"Indeed, Jack, I would," cried the blushing girl, eagerly clapping her hands.

"Since the skiff is named for you, I thought it was only proper that you should be at the launching, though it will not be a very imposing spectacle," laughed Jack.

"Nevertheless, I shall enjoy it."

"I have sent word to Nellie Conner, your chum, and she no doubt will go with us."

"I'm quite sure of it, Jack, and the ride will be delightful."

"We are going to start about one o'clock," continued Jack. "I've got the running gear of Mr. Gratton's wagon, one of our neighbors, and he also has loaned me his big gray horse. We're going to load the skiff on the running gear, and you and Nellie can ride in the boat, while we boys tramp alongside."

"That will be fine, also a ride in the woods at this time of the year," cried Kate.

"I also have provided seats for you to ride home on."

"That's very good of you, Jack, and just like you," said the girl, with a fond light in her bright eyes. "What time do you wish to start?"

"In about an hour, Kate. You may come over to my house as soon as you are ready, and Nellie probably will be there by that time. Bring Brodie along, also, and we'll soon have things in shape to get under way."

"I'll come as soon as possible," replied Kate, as Jack bowed politely and drew down the steps to depart.

Promptly at one o'clock Kate arrived at Jack's home, where she found Nellie Conner waiting for her at the front gate.

"I'm so glad you could go, Nellie," she cried, as they met. "It will be great sport riding up there in the new boat."

"So it will, Kate, and it was just like Jack to think of us in this way."

"Hasn't Brodie come over here?"

"Yes; he just went in."

"He started ahead of me," laughed Kate. "I couldn't hold him."

"The boys are loading the boat upon the wagon wheels."

"Let's go in and see them. We don't want to miss anything."

"That we don't," smiled Nellie.

They locked arms and made their way around the pretty cottage, then out toward the shed where the boys were gathered. There they found Jack and his cousin, Tom Lightfoot, also Brodie and Lafe Lampton, who had come to assist in the work.

Nearly up to the open shed door Jack had backed the wheels of Gratton's wagon, from which the body had been removed, while from the floor of the shed to the rear axle he had adjusted a strong skid, up which the skiff was to be run on rollers.

"Now lend a hand, boys, and we'll have her loaded in two shakes of a lamb's tail," cried Jack, as the girls approached. "We mustn't keep the ladies waiting."

"Oh, we shan't mind waiting, Jack," said Kate, with an appreciative nod.

"Lafe and I will handle her on this side," cried Tom, who was steadying the boat on the rollers. "You and Brodie get a grip on the other side, Jack."

"That will be good enough," assented Lightfoot.

"Now we're ready."

"All together! Yo, heave, ho!"

Under their united efforts, which by no means were required to move the light skiff, however, the boat was run out of the shed and well up onto the skid.

"Steady her, now," cried Jack. "Steady her until I can get between the wheels. You slip in between them on that side, Lafe, and then we can lift her to the fore axle."

"Gee whillikins! I can lift her there all alone," cried Lafe, who was a strong, husky chap with no end of brawn and muscles. "If I couldn't I'd go at swinging the clubs."

"I know you can do the lifting all right, Lafe, but I don't wish to bang her," said Jack, who never did things with a rush unless the occasion absolutely required it. "Now we are ready again. All together—once more! There she is, boys, in just the right place."

"Going to tie her on, ain't you?" demanded Lafe, tersely.

"Certainly."

"Here's the line," said Tom, hastening out of the shed. "I'll make her fast to the rear axle, then you can fix her forward."

"All right, Tom; go ahead."

It required but a very few minutes to bind the boat securely to the running gear, and Jack then closed the

shed door and announced that they were ready to start.

"I'll first get a couple of cushions from the house, Kate, for you and Nellie to sit on," said he, turning to the girls. "You'll find it kind of rough riding without any springs, but I guess you'll enjoy the trip."

"I know we shall," declared Kate.

Having brought out the cushions, Jack arranged them on the bottom of the skiff near the aft thwart, then placed a chair for the girls to step on in order to reach the boat.

"You can sit in the bottom and rest your backs against the thwart," he explained, as he assisted them aboard. "That will be easier than sitting bolt upright on one of the seats."

"Oh, this is easy enough for anyone, Jack, and so very novel," laughed Kate, as both girls arranged themselves in the boat.

"Now we are ready and will start at once," said Jack, catching up his coat from the ground.

"Hadh't we better take a gun along with us?" asked Lafe, halting. "We might get a crack at something, a duck or a quail, mebbe."

"No, Lafe, not to-day," protested Lightfoot.

"Why not, Jack?"

"Because it's not always pleasant for girls to see birds shot," Jack quietly explained. "There'll be time enough for us to do our shooting when they are not with us."

"That's right, too," added Tom, with a nod of approval. "Leave the shooting until to-morrow."

"Oh, I don't mind," dubiously assented Lafe, who was endowed with an appetite to be proud of. "I only thought I might land a quail or the like for my supper."

"We'll bag something bigger than quail to-morrow, Lafe," replied Jack.

Then he gave the gray gelding the word, and the jovial party was away amid shouts and laughter.

"Gracious, I guess we shall need cushions, Nellie," chuckled Kate Strawn, as the wagon jolted heavily while going down the incline from Jack's front gate into the road.

"I was struck with the same feeling," laughed Nellie, under her breath.

None of this reached the ears of the boys, however, who were out of hearing.

Jack and Brodie Strawn walked in advance, looking after the horse; while Tom Lightfoot and Lafe brought up in the rear, keeping an eye on the boat.

Their way took them through a portion of the busi-

ness part of the town, where they were the observed of all observers. Everybody knew that Jack Lightfoot now was out on another of his expeditions, but the skiff led all to infer that it was a fishing project. Jack had foreseen that this would be a natural conclusion, and so felt sure of getting the first crack at any game that might that night have appeared at the swamp.

As they were leaving the outskirts of the town and entering the road across country, the swamp being nearly six miles distant, Brodie Strawn suddenly caught sight of a solitary horseman just making the brow of a hill something like a quarter mile away.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, turning to Jack. "Isn't that Kennedy, the Cranford constable?"

"It rides like him, Brodie," said Jack, after watching the distant horseman for a few moments.

"He's coming this way."

"We shall know presently. Yes, that's Kennedy, all right."

"Something must be up, Jack, to have taken him out of town on horseback."

"Possibly he will inform us."

"I say!" shouted Lafe Lampton, from back of the wagon. "Isn't that the constable?"

"Nobody else," answered Jack. "Brodie and I were just talking about him."

"I'll bet he's out after somebody."

"That's a fat conclusion, Lafe," laughed Brodie Strawn. "Do you imagine we thought he was out riding for his health?"

"Oh, go and chase yourself," growled Lafe, coming forward. "You're not half funny."

"Never tried to be," grinned Brodie.

"It sounded so, anyway."

"It's the fault of your ears, Lafe. They were out of tune."

"Stop quarreling, you two boys," commanded Kate, from her seat in the boat. "We are not out to hear anything of that kind."

"Whoa!" Jack Lightfoot suddenly exclaimed at this point, seizing the horse's bridle. "Hold up for a minute, boys."

"Going to stop?"

"Yes," replied Jack, who had been intently watching the approaching horseman. "Kennedy is going to wait and speak to us, I know by the look of his face."

"I believe you are right, Jack."

"There's something wrong, too, that's plain enough," said Tom Lightfoot. "He has been riding like fun. His horse is all of a lather."

"We'll see what he has to say, boys."

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSTABLE'S DISCLOSURES.

Jack Lightfoot and the Cranford boys with whom he associated all stood well with the constable of the town. Very few of the more matured citizens, in fact, held a higher place in Kennedy's estimation than Jack did.

The latter had hardly made his last remark, having already stopped the team, when the doughty constable reined in his jaded horse scarce ten feet from the waiting boys.

"Hello, Jack, where are you bound?" he cried, heartily.

"Out to Hickman's swamp," replied Lightfoot, who would not have stooped to mislead the constable.

"I've just come from out that way," cried Kennedy. "If you happen to see any suspicious-looking characters while you are out there, I wish you'd let me know as quickly as possible."

The girls in the skiff lost color a little upon hearing this, but Jack did not observe it, his entire attention being upon the dusty, grim-faced constable and his foam-flecked horse.

"Certainly I will, Kennedy," he replied. "But what's the trouble?"

"Haven't you heard the news?"

"What news?"

"About the burglary."

"Not a word about it," said Jack.

"When and where?" asked Lafe Lampton, quickly, while all hands pricked up their ears.

"At Mr. John Dillworthy's house," the constable hastened to explain. "It was broken into some time last night and nearly five hundred dollars' worth of silver ware was stolen."

"Gee whittaker! that's the third burglary we've had in Cranford inside of a month," cried Lafe.

"There must be a regular gang of house burglars somewhere about here," added Brodie Strawn.

"I had not heard of this robbery, Mr. Kennedy," said Jack, less excitedly. "I should think it would have been reported about town this morning."

"It wasn't discovered till nearly noon, Jack."

"How was that?"

"Dillworthy and his wife were out of town last night, and returned home about eleven o'clock this morning. They then saw what had happened during their absence, and Dillworthy hastened to report the case to me."

"I see," nodded Jack.

"I soon learned that a team driven by two men was

seen leaving town in this direction about three o'clock this morning," continued Kennedy. "They drove very fast, and their haste, along with the early hour, appear suspicious."

"Were either of them recognized?"

"No, nor their horse. It wasn't much of a clew for me to work on, but I thought it best to hit up the trail while it was hot."

"That's right, too."

"I've been nearly out to Hickman's farm, but can get no further trace of the two rascals. I thought you might possibly run across them, or strike some clew to them, in which case you could hasten to inform me."

"I certainly will," replied Jack, an assurance quickly echoed by his companions.

"Good enough," nodded Kennedy. "I now am heading back to town to see what more I can light upon."

"I hope you'll be successful," said Jack. "We are having a good many burglaries in and around Cranford. It looks, as Brodie says, as if there might be a regular gang of thieves settled somewhere in this section."

"If there is, Jack, we'll run them down sooner or later," declared Kennedy, making ready to depart. "You know where to find me, Jack, in case you discover anything."

Jack nodded, and the constable again gave his horse the rein and rode briskly away.

"I hope we shall not encounter any burglars," said Kate, a bit apprehensively. "I have had all the experiences with men of that stamp that I care to have."

"I don't think there is any danger of it," smiled Jack, reassuringly. "The road I shall take to go to the spot where I intend leaving the skiff doesn't pass near any dwelling houses, and is but little frequented. Burglars would not travel that way, I'm sure, and you need have no fear."

"I'm not exactly afraid," replied Kate; "only I'd prefer not to meet them."

"Well, I'd just like to meet them," declared Brodie, with a grim headshake. "There'd be something doing mighty quick. Next thing we know, Kate, our own home will be made a mark by these scallawags and we'll wake up some morning with nothing but tin plates to eat off of."

"Humph!" grunted Lafe, with a grimace. "I could eat off of a bare table if there was something tolerably good on it."

This brought a laugh from his hearers, all hands knowing what a voracious feeder Lafe was when he

cut loose, and the journey to the swamp was done with less thought of meeting with burglars and ruffians.

Mr. Dillworthy, whose house had been robbed the previous night, was one of the wealthiest merchants of Cranford, and was well known and liked by all of the boys. This was the third burglary that had been committed recently, and the people naturally were somewhat disturbed by the frequency of the outrages.

As Jack had predicted, however, no suspicious characters were seen during their journey, and at the end of an hour they were well over the range of hills and striking across the country beyond, which made toward the southern edge of the great swamp.

Here the country was covered with belts of woods, some of which had been partly cut away, leaving rough clearings here and there. It was well into the late autumn season, and most of the leaves had fallen from the trees, or hung sparsely here and there still rich with their fall colorings.

Jack presently struck into a narrow road through these woods, and Brodie Strawn quickly asked:

"Why are you taking this road, Jack? It leads to one of the wildest parts of the swamp. Is it out this way that you have built your duck blind?"

"No, not exactly," replied Jack. "But I know of a good place up here for hiding the skiff, so I'm heading for that point."

"Oh, that's your scheme, is it?"

"The place is on the lower edge of one of the larger ponds," continued Jack. "We've built the duck blind over on the other side of it, but we'll not go around there to-day. By leaving the boat on this side we'll have less walking to it to-morrow morning, and we can cross the pond more easily and quickly in the skiff. It's quite a long walk along the shore."

"I see the point," nodded Brodie.

It was nearly three o'clock when the party arrived at the place of which Jack had spoken, and it was, as he had said, an ideal place for concealing the skiff from the observation of any other gunners who might head that way.

The road which they had followed ended in a thick belt of woods, which bordered closely upon the southern edge of the extensive swamp.

Just beyond the break of the heavier timber was a shallow creek, part of a larger pond which could be seen through the trees and the dense shrubbery bordering the low-lying water in every direction.

Skirting the edge of the creek was a wide growth of tall flags and bullrushes, and it was in the midst

of these that Jack Lightfoot had decided to conceal the skiff during the night.

The silence of the place, the impressive solitude, the primeval wildness of this miniature wilderness, all presented a scene of great interest to the two girls, who never before had visited the swamp, and their enjoyment of the novelty surpassed even their earlier anticipations.

CHAPTER IV.

MORE STARTLING NEWS.

"You girls now can amuse yourselves in your own way, while we are busy unloading the boat," said Jack Lightfoot, while he assisted them from the skiff.

"The place is amusement enough of itself," Kate gleefully cried, as she alighted upon the leaf-strewn ground. "This is like walking on a carpet."

"Somewhat," smiled Jack.

"I never was so near the swamp before. It's awfully interesting."

"It is too late in the season for anything in the way of wild flowers," said Jack; "but you'll find plenty of handsome ferns out that way."

"We'll gather some to take home," said Nellie.

"Look out that you don't get lost," cautioned Jack.

"Oh, we'll not go out of sight, Jack, you may be sure of that," laughed Kate.

Leaving the girls to divert themselves as best pleased them, the boys now proceeded to unload the boat from the running gear, and soon had it safely upon the ground.

Jack Lightfoot then drew on a pair of long rubber boots, and with the help of his companions the skiff was quickly borne to the edge of the shallow creek.

"I'll haul her into the water," cried Jack, slipping in among the tall flags and sedge grass. "There's no need of any of you wetting your feet."

It was soft and boggy down near the water's edge, and so the skiff slipped easily over the wet soil. It took Jack but a few minutes to conceal her amid the flags and bullrushes, where he secured her with a long painter reaching to the shore, and which he also carefully concealed from view.

"I'll shove the oars under this brushwood, as an additional precaution," he remarked, as he strode back to the upland. "Then, in case any persons should accidentally stumble upon the skiff, they can't make off with her."

"That's a good idea, too," declared Lafe, approvingly. "We'd feel like thirty cents, Jack, if we ar-

rived here to-morrow morning and found ourselves without a gunning skiff."

"I don't see any birds flying," said Tom Lightfoot, staring about a bit dubiously. "I hope you fellows will not have had your trouble for nothing."

"This is not a very good locality for them, Tom," explained Jack. "Wild fowl are more likely to haunt the other side of the pond, where the water is more open."

"Is that so?"

"We'll go across in the skiff, and in the early morning I have no doubt we'll strike some."

"I hope so."

"Me, too!" exclaimed Lafe, with vivid anticipations of roast duck.

"I'm concealing the skiff here," added Jack; "only because it's the nearest point to Cranford, and so will save us considerable walking. Our duck blind is over on the other shore, beyond that point that makes out yonder."

"I say!" exclaimed Brodie Strawn. "Isn't it somewhere up in this section that old Jerry Sampson comes looking for the blooming torture plants that he imposes upon us?"

"What a way to speak of Prof. Sampson, one of your teachers," protested Kate, as both girls now rejoined the group and heard Brodie's remark.

"Well, isn't it torture to have to analyze the outlandish things he brings into the classroom, Jack's in the pulpit, skunk cabbages and the like of them?" laughed Brodie. "It's torture enough for me, Kate, I can tell you that. The study of botany is not my long suit and never will be."

The man referred to in this way was Prof. Jeremy Sampson, one of the instructors in the Cranford academy, a teacher not very well liked by most of the pupils, possibly because he was exceedingly thorough in his work and often imposed tasks of considerable severity.

As an instructor of botany, which was his own special delight, one of Sampson's fads was to scour the country in search of flowers, shrubs, ferns and the like, which he brought into his classroom in endless variety and abundance, and compelled the students to study and analyze.

It was no unusual thing on a holiday to see Sampson's tall, angular figure, with a bag or basket over his shoulder, in the fields or woods miles away from Cranford, seeking for new specimens of plants or flowers.

As may be imagined from this, moreover, he was a

very eccentric man, close upon fifty years old, and was as tall and thin as a fence rail, with a face as beardless and narrow as a hatchet.

"Yes, I have heard of his being out this way in search of plants," said Jack Lightfoot, in reply to Brodie's question.

"So have I."

"But that's not much wonder," laughed Jack; "since he goes nearly everywhere."

"Well, I hope we don't run across him to-day," growled Brodie, with a grimace. "I see enough of him in school hours, and more than enough."

"We are not likely to," said Jack. "It's after three o'clock and we must soon start for home."

"Let's get under way at once," cried Lafe. "There's nothing more to be done here."

The journey home to Cranford proved uneventful, and the dusk of the early autumn evening was settled over the woods and fields before Jack and his companions arrived in town.

There they separated for home at once, with the exception of Lafe Lampton, who remained with Jack to help him put Mr. Gratton's wagon in shape and return it to the owner's stable.

"That must be done to-night, Lafe, for we want to start before daylight to-morrow morning," said Jack, when they were alone.

"That's so," assented Lafe. "The earlier the better."

"We can return this team in course of half an hour, after which you can go home to supper."

"And I won't do a thing to supper," grinned Lafe. "I feel as if I could eat a ton."

"You'd fall short a few pounds, I'm thinking," laughed Jack, as they sprang down in his yard and set about replacing the light wagon body. "And after you have had your supper, Lafe, I think you'd better bring your gunning outfit down here and spend the night with me."

"Mebbe that would be a good scheme," said Lafe. "Then I'll be sure to wake up in the morning."

It was so arranged between them, and just before nine o'clock that evening Lafe returned rigged from top to toe for the following day's sport, with his gun over his shoulder.

"Good enough!" exclaimed Jack, when he admitted him to the house. "We'll turn in early, Lafe, so to be bright and fresh in the morning."

"We ought to get a good day's sport, I'm thinking," declared Lafe, who really was thinking more about the viands that might be the result of it.

"There's no doubt about it in my mind," said Jack. "It's coming colder to-night, and should be crisp and sharp in the morning. That'll set the birds flying, and I'll wager we bag a good bunch of them."

Just as the boys were about turning in, however, they heard the sound of the doorbell, and Jack's mother presently called up the stairs saying that he was wanted in the parlor.

"Who is it?" asked Jack, quietly. "I'm nearly undressed."

"Mr. Kennedy, the constable," she replied. "I hope, Jack, there's nothing wrong."

"There's nothing wrong with me, I assure you. Tell him I'll come down in a jiffy."

"It's the constable again," said he to Lafe, as he returned to his chamber.

"What the dickens can he want, now?" Lafe surprisedly demanded.

"He may have something more to tell us about that burglary," replied Jack.

"That's so! Perhaps he has got some clew to the thieves."

"I'll go down and see."

Jack had slipped into his clothes while speaking, and he now hastened downstairs and joined Kennedy in the parlor.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Jack, just as you were going to bed," the genial constable apologized, as Jack entered the room.

"No trouble at all, Mr. Kennedy," was the hearty reply. "What can I do for you?"

"You can tell me whether you saw Mr. Sampson, the school teacher, during your outing this afternoon."

"No, I did not see him," replied Jack, with surprise. "We did not lay eyes on him."

"Well, he's missing," said Kennedy, bluntly.

"Missing?"

"Word has been sent to me by the head master at the academy, who evidently has become anxious about the missing man, and he has requested me to make some inquiries," explained the constable. "I remembered having seen you heading out over the hills, and I thought that you possibly had run across Sampson during the afternoon."

"Did he go out that way?"

"Nobody seems to know where he went. One of the servants up at the academy states that he started out about one o'clock, with his fox terrier along with him and a small basket in his hand. It's not known which way he went, however, nor what he was going after."

"Probably after plants or flowers," said Jack. "He frequently makes long jaunts for that purpose."

"But he never has been known to remain away as late as this."

"That's true, no doubt."

"And he couldn't be gathering plants or flowers after dark."

"Not very well," admitted Jack, not a little mystified. "There are several holidays coming, however, and possibly Mr. Sampson has gone to visit some friends."

"I suggested that to the head master," replied Kennedy, shaking his head. "But he says that Sampson has no intimate friends about here, and is never away from his rooms overnight."

"That probably is true, for he is very regular in his habits."

"One fellow I questioned, I'll not mention his name, hinted that Sampson might have had a hand in the burglary last night, and that he now has lit out for keeps," remarked Kennedy. "But I don't take any stock in that, to tell the truth."

"It's absurd on the face of it," declared Jack, with some indignation.

"So I think."

"Mr. Sampson is an eccentric man, and all that, but I'm sure that he's away above doing anything dishonest," Jack warmly added. "It is very possible that he went further than usual this afternoon, and has not yet been able to walk back, or he may have mistaken the road and lost his way."

"That is my theory," nodded Kennedy. "But I am told that he knows the lay of the land in every direction, and that it's wholly improbable that he has lost his way."

"Has his dog returned?"

"Not yet."

"It does seem mighty mysterious, I'll admit," said Jack, thoughtfully. "I hope nothing serious has happened to him."

"He may have fallen from a ledge, or met with an accident of some kind. That seems to me to be the only explanation of his long absence."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't see that we can do anything before to-morrow," replied Kennedy, rising to go.

"Perhaps he'll show up by that time."

"That's my opinion, Jack. He's certainly old enough and big enough to look after himself, and I think this stir over his absence is a little bit previous."

If he doesn't turn up by to-morrow, there'll be some sense in making a hullabaloo over it."

"I guess he will return all right, Mr. Kennedy," said Jack, accompanying him into the hall. "I am going out to the swamp after wild fowl early to-morrow morning, and I'll keep my eyes open for some sign of him. In case I run across him and anything has happened, I'll at once bring word to town."

"Good enough, Jack."

"I think, however, that he'll have returned before morning."

"I hope so. Good-night, Jack."

"Good-night, Mr. Kennedy."

CHAPTER V.

A MORNING ENCOUNTER.

"Gee whittaker! it is a bit sharp this morning."

This exclamation came from Lafe Lampton an hour before daylight, when he and Jack Lightfoot left the latter's home for their first day's sport at the swamp.

Jack had arisen long before five o'clock and prepared a hot breakfast, also a lunch to be taken with them, and it was not much later when the two boys shouldered their guns and left the house.

Stars were still twinkling in the sky overhead, but away down low in the east a streak of gray was the harbinger of the approaching dawn.

"It's going to be a fine day all right," said Jack, with a glance at the heavens. "And it will be warm enough, Lafe, once the sun gets up and we strike the wild fowl."

"It'll be warm enough for them, all right," laughed Lafe.

"So it will."

"I'm not cold, Jack, as to that."

"Nor am I."

"These woolen gloves your mother knit for us are out of sight."

"They are nice and warm," replied Jack, shifting his gun to the hollow of his arm. "We'll strike a good stiff gait, Lafe, and that will set our blood moving."

"Let her go, then," cried Lafe, cheerfully. "You'll not find me lagging."

"We must cover the six miles in but little more than an hour," added Jack.

"That will be easy."

"And it will bring us to the swamp about seven o'clock, just as the sun shows above the tree tops."

Both boys were finely rigged for their outing. A pair of long-legged rubber boots, strapped high about

each thigh; a pair of warm woolen trousers, an old dogskin jacket and a thick woolen cap.

Each wore strapped around his waist, moreover, a belt filled full of cartridges charged for duck and geese, and both boys had double-barreled breech-loading guns.

"I cannot help thinking about Prof. Sampson and what Kennedy told me last night," said Jack, as they trudged rapidly on their way.

"Jimminy crickets!" laughed Lafe. "It would be funny if we ran foul of him out here even on a holiday."

"Not so funny, Lafe, if anything serious had happened to him."

"That would queer our day's sport, all right."

"It seems strange that he did not return home last evening," said Jack, in thoughtful tones. "It was nearly ten o'clock when Kennedy called at my house."

"The old plant hunter had no business to be out at that hour," growled Lafe. "He ought to have been at home and abed."

"Perhaps he wishes he had been."

"It'll be just our luck to stumble on him somewhere. Mebbe with a broken leg. That would be excuse enough for any man's not walking home."

Jack laughed and shook his head. He knew that Lafe's bark was worse than his bite, and that he was not only a warm-hearted boy, but thoroughly reliable whenever an occasion required it.

A period of silence followed.

Jack had begun hitting up a fast pace, they now being well out of town, and he knew that continuous talking while they were walking rapidly served only to use up their wind.

For half an hour the two strode rapidly on, covering nearly half the distance, and by that time the streak of gray in the east had become a streak of mingled red and yellow.

"We shall see the sun in another quarter-hour," said Jack, as they entered the road through the woods.

"Hello! there's a brace of quail!"

As quick as a flash, when the wild whirl of the birds smote his ear, Jack's gun had leaped to his shoulder and belched out its contents on the crisp morning air.

Though thirty yards away and flying for dear life, both birds pitched earthward and left only a cluster of fluttering feathers in the air where they had been a moment before.

"Good shot! A bully one!" shouted Lafe, triumphantly.

"Merely for practice, and Number Four shot. I think

it pretty fair myself," laughed Jack, as he ran and picked up the two birds.

"It was a good one, Jack, for all that."

"I've blown one of them most to pieces, but I reckon there's a good meal in the pair. I'm specially fond of quail."

"Too little of 'em for me," tersely answered Lafe, with a significant grin. "I want both quantity and quality, chiefly quantity."

"You ought to feed on an ostrich," laughed Jack, as he thrust the dead birds into the game pouch of his coat.

"I think that would about hit my capacity," laughed Lafe.

"Well, let's get on," said Jack. "We still have good two miles to cover."

"I'm with you."

With which both struck again through the woodland road, and more than another mile was covered without incident.

Then, just as the first rays of the morning sun shot like yellow beams through the trees, a second exclamation came from Lafe Lampton.

"Hello! who the dickens are those fellows?"

From beyond a clump of trees and shrubbery some thirty yards away, two roughly clad men had suddenly stepped out into the road, where both halted quickly, with sharp glances at each other, the instant they saw Jack and Lafe approaching.

They were tough-looking customers, both of them, carrying guns and with slouch hats drawn over their brows.

Both were upward of fifty years old, and with their coarse garments and unshaven faces they presented a type of ruffian by no means agreeable to meet.

"Don't stop unless they speak first," whispered Jack, when Lafe showed an inclination to halt. "One of them is Bill Dillon, a worthless fellow who lives further around the swamp. I've seen him in Cranford several times, but he doesn't know me."

"Do you know the other one?" murmured Lafe.

"I never saw him."

"He looks like the breaking up of a hard winter," growled Lafe, under his breath.

It was afterward learned that Dillon's companion was a man named Jim Wagstaff, and that he had a reputation, where he was known at all, even worse than Dillon had, which certainly was bad enough.

Jack and Lafe had continued walking up the road while quietly whispering their remarks, and both hoped they would not be accosted by these fellows. Yet

neither felt the slightest fear of the two men, as was presently evident when Lafe's corns were trod on.

Both men waited till the two boys were within ten feet of them, when Dillon roughly cried:

"Slow up, you two kids! Where are yer going?"

Jack promptly halted and quietly answered, politely, yet man fashion:

"Over to the swamp after wild fowl."

"Are yer sure thet's what ye're looking fer?" demanded Wagstaff, with a suspicious gleam in his ugly black eyes. "Gimme the truth now, d'ye hear?"

Jack drew himself up with some dignity and coldly answered, yet with habitual politeness:

"I always speak the truth."

"Oh, yer do, eh?"

"That's what I do."

"Waal, see thet yer speak it now," cried Wagstaff.

"Are yer sure wild fowl is what ye're looking fer?"

"Well, we're not looking for trouble, mister," cried Lafe, with startling abruptness. "If you think we are, you're off your trolley."

This was when Lafe broke out. He did not like Jim Wagstaff's distrustful look, nor the threatening voice with which he had addressed Jack, and it needed only an affront of this kind, particularly when directed against Jack Lightfoot, to send Lafe's defiant temper clean over the traces.

Both men appeared a bit startled by his sharp retort, and Wagstaff now frowned more darkly and growled, significantly patting the stock of his gun:

"Look hyar, youngster! Don't yer git sassy to me, or ye'll git more'n yer looking fer."

"Oh, we will, eh?" cried Lafe, defiantly.

"Thet's what yer will, honey!"

"Well, if it comes to that, mister, you'll find that we can shoot as straight and as quick as you can. And we're loaded for geese, mister, too!"

And Lafe dropped his gun into the hollow of his arm with a move so sudden and decided that Jack Lightfoot impulsively put out his hand to restrain him.

"Steady, Lafe!" he cautioned. "None of that."

"Well, I don't propose to have that guy drive me into a hole," growled Lafe. "I have as good a right to be here as he has, and mebbe better."

"Waal, don't git sassy, boy, thet's all I've got to say."

"You've said that once already."

"Oh, dry up, both of ye," Bill Dillon now interrupted, with a warning look at his companion. "We don't mean ye any harm, boys, but sort o' wanted to know what yer were after up this way."

"We are after ducks," Jack now replied, while Lafe relapsed into grim silence, with his eyes steadily fixed upon those of Wagstaff.

"Up in the swamp?" inquired Dillon.

"Yes," said Jack.

"Ye'll need a boat, won't ye?"

"Perhaps so," Jack evasively rejoined. "We are going to have a try at them, anyway."

"Ye wasn't looking fer nuthing else, eh?"

"No, that's all."

"Whar d'ye hail from?"

"We live in Cranford."

"Did ye leave there this morning?"

"Yes, about half-past five o'clock."

"Ye must have sot a good clip to hev got here by this time," put in Jim Wagstaff, with another distrustful flash of his black eyes.

"Well, we came along quite smartly," nodded Jack.

"Is there any news in Cranford?" asked Dillon, with some show of carelessness.

"None that I think of."

"Thet so?"

"There was a burglary night before last," added Jack, when it occurred to him.

"Don't ye call thet news?"

"Well, I don't know many of the particulars."

"Know whose place 'twas, don't ye?"

"It was the house of Mr. John Dillworthy."

"Did they git much?"

"Who?"

"The crooks, o' course!" growled Dillon. "D'ye think I mean the covey as owns the house?"

"I don't know just how much the burglars got away with," replied Jack, anxious to end the conversation and continue on his way.

But both men stood in his way, and Dillon detained him with further questions.

"Have they arrested 'em yit?" he next demanded.

"I don't think so," said Jack, with a headshake.

"Ain't they got any clew to 'em?"

"I believe not. I saw Kennedy, the constable, yesterday, and he said there was no trace of the rascals."

"Is thet so, me lad?" Dillon now rejoined, quite pleasantly. "Waal, I hope they'll land 'em, and mebbe they will. D'ye want to go on, now?"

"If you have asked all the questions you wish," said Jack, dryly.

"Waal, I reckon them's about all," laughed Dillon. "Only the next time ye meet two gentlemen in the road, ye want to be right perlite to start with. Hold up a bit!"

"Well?" said Jack, halting.

"Take keer ye don't git inter anything thet don't belong to ye. Keep on this 'ere side o' the swamp, mind thet!"

"We intend doing so."

"'Cause I okkipy a crib over on tother side, me lad, and I hate to find ye prowling around there. It might be most as much as yer neck is wuth."

"We shall not trouble anything belonging to you," replied Jack, coldly.

"See thet ye don't," added Dillon, as he and Wagstaff drew to one side of the road and let the boys pass. "If ye don't see to it—waal, in thet case I'll come mighty nigh seeing to you. Now go on about yer business, the two o' yer!"

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE DUCK BLIND.

"I didn't like the eyes of that fellow in brown," declared Lafe, as he and Jack again hastened up the road.

"Neither of them looked very inviting," laughed Jack, now that the episode was ended. "I guess we'll see no more of them."

"More or less won't bother me," growled Lafe, still nursing his resentment. "I'm not afraid of them."

"Nor am I, Lafe, as far as that goes," replied Jack. "It's much better, however, not to go looking for trouble."

"It struck me that Dillon was mighty anxious to know what we were looking for," answered Lafe, with obvious misgivings. "He asked us twice about that, did you notice?"

"Yes, I did."

"What do you suppose he thought?"

"Possibly he had an idea that we were after something belonging to him," replied Jack. "He may have a skiff in the swamp, or something of that sort."

"He's got a bat in his belfry, all right, that I'm sure of."

"He's not worth talking about."

"That's right, too."

"Ah! there's the pond," cried Jack, as they rounded a curve in the narrow road, and brought both the pond and creek into view. "It's already hit by the sun. Get a move on, Lafe!"

In their enthusiasm they forgot all about the two men, and both broke into a run and dashed down the low hill leading to the creek.

"The skiff is here, all right," cried Jack, as they neared the spot. "You get the oars, Lafe, while I clear the painter. We'll be afloat in a jiffy."

Lafe hastened to comply, while Jack took the kedge aboard and stowed it with the painter under the forward thwart out of the way.

"I'll row to start with," said he, as Lafe slopped in among the flags and stepped aboard with the oars.

"All right, Jack. I'll look after the guns."

"She'll slip along more easily after we get through these flags and into the clearer water."

The growth was thick about the edge of the creek, but after a dint of hard pushing Jack forced the boat through the fringe of flags and into the open water.

"Now we're away," said he, dropping to the thwart and gripping the oars. "I'll head straight around yonder point and make for the duck blind at once."

"That's the stuff."

"How's the wind?"

"Nearly east."

"That's a favorable quarter for us, Lafe, for it blows across the pond toward the blind. Ducks have a deucedly fine scent, and we must be to the leeward of them."

"They always head into the wind, don't they?"

"Sure! That's so they can scent danger."

"I don't see any signs as yet—yes, by jimminy crickets! there's a flock of three over in that little cove," Lafe suddenly cried, dropping his voice to a suppressed whisper.

All excitement, he had caught up his gun and risen to one knee, pointing out to Jack the three black specks in the water something like a hundred yards away.

For under Jack Lightfoot's sturdy strokes the skiff had now left the narrow creek and entered the broader sweep of the pond, nearly out to the point of land which Jack had mentioned.

"Keep your head, Lafe," he coolly rejoined, resting on his oars long enough to have a look at the distant fowl.

"Can't we get one crack at them?" demanded Lafe, eagerly.

"Not from this direction," said Jack, confidently. "We are nearly to the windward of them, and even if they failed to see us they would scent us before we could get within gunshot."

"Mebbe so."

"They have already," cried Jack, suddenly. "See, there they go! They're making straight across the pond."

"By thunder! if we were in our blind now, Jack, we could drop them all right. They are heading nearly over it."

"There'll be others, Lafe, and the sooner we get under cover the better," replied Jack, again bending to the oars.

A few vigorous strokes carried them around the point, and then, off to the west, stretched the side shore of the larger pond.

Here there was a background of dense woods, while the edge of the pond was bordered thickly with shrubs, tall flags and sedge grass, outside of which was the clearer water.

Jack Lightfoot rowed quickly into a sort of cove, which broke the line of shore in that place, and drove the light skiff in among the flags.

Here the boys had previously constructed the duck blind, that all might be ready when they arrived. It consisted of a shelter for the boat, built high enough to conceal it and enable them to crouch out of sight of flying birds overhead. It was cleverly constructed partly of light branches near the shore, and of flags and bullrushes which arched over the outer end of the skiff.

Into this concealment Jack quickly ran the skiff, where she lay easily, there being no tide or wind to move her.

"Now we'll soon be ready for them," said Jack, as he shipped the oars. "We'll keep these handy, for if we drop any game we'll have to slip out into the pond and pick them up, not having any dog with us."

"Drat a dog!" rejoined Lafe, removing his gloves and taking up his gun. "They are more trouble than they are worth."

"Hello! there's a flock settling into the water away over yonder!" exclaimed Jack, pointing across the pond. "We can't get them from here, but I think——"

"Easy!" whispered Lafe, suddenly. "There are some heading this way."

Jack quickly caught up his gun, and in a moment both boys were crouching side by side in the skiff, ready for a shot.

As Jack Lightfoot had foreseen, the wild fowl had fairly struck into the swamp, and the sharp morning air was making them lively.

Lafe instantly fired one barrel, dropping a brant, moreover, when the same three ducks which they had startled from the pond a few minutes before came flying over the woods in the background. With a wild whirl and a splash they settled in the open water scarce thirty yards from the skiff.

Lafe's gun quickly came to his shoulder, but Jack whispered sharply:

"Hold on! Don't fire yet, Lafe. They are too scattered for you to hit all of them before they can rise. Wait till they line up, or draw nearer together."

Lafe held his breath and waited.

The three ducks were sailing to and fro on the rippling water, acting a bit nervously and heading squarely into the wind, but at the end of a couple of minutes they were nearly in a line from the boys, presenting a tolerable shot, and Jack muttered softly:

"Let 'em have it, Lafe!"

Bang!

Lafe's gun belched out the moment Jack spoke. He had fired a trifle low, however, killing only the nearest duck and wounding one of the others. Two instantly rose, but Jack Lightfoot's eye already was glancing over the barrel of his gun.

Bang! Bang!

Though he discharged both barrels the reports seemed nearly simultaneous, so quickly had one followed the other.

Down came both birds, one dead, the other fluttering wildly on the sunlit water.

"We've got 'em!" yelled Lafe, excitedly. "That was a corking shot, Jack. I fired a bit too low to kill the bunch."

"Never mind, Lafe, as long as we have them," laughed Jack. "We'll run the skiff out and pick them up, then slip back into our blind."

"That won't take long."

Under the enthusiasm of the two it required hardly a minute, and with the three dead ducks in the boat the boys were presently waiting for their next quarry.

They had longer to wait this time, however, for the noise of the guns tended to frighten other birds from that locality for a spell. It was nearly an hour before they got another good shot, and this they had to take on the wing.

Looking up the sweep of shore, Jack's keen eyes suddenly discovered quite a large flock making down over the tree tops, in a line that should bring them nearly opposite the skiff and but a little distance off the shore.

"Be ready," said he, hurriedly calling Lafe's attention to them.

"I'm ready! Gee whiz, what a bunch of them!"

"I think there are some brant among them."

"Sure there are!"

"You fire first, just as they come abreast of us," whispered Jack, with his eyes fixed constantly on the approaching game.

"All right."

"Then I'll take what's left."

"I'll give 'em both barrels," muttered Lafe, excitedly.

"Keep cool," murmured Jack. "You can't do good work if your head is in a whirl."

"I'm cool enough to hit that bunch."

"By Jove! there's a big goose up above them."

"In gunshot?"

"Nearly."

"Can you hit him?"

"I can try!" muttered Jack, now a bit excited himself. "Let 'em have it, Lafe! Hurry up!"

Lafe instantly fired one barrel, dropping a brant, but the hammer fell on the second cartridge without discharging it.

As quick as a flash Lafe tried to open the breech, but in some way it had become stuck and he could not start it, and a more disgusted expression never rose to a sportsman's face.

Jack Lightfoot had not been idle, however. He saw what had happened to Lafe, and he let go through the scurrying flock on his own hook.

Brant or goose, it mattered little, for at the double discharge of Jack's faithful old gun bore the pilgrim of the upper air took a tumble.

Half a score of birds dotted the sparkling water, and in the very midst of them fell a mammoth goose, dropped dead under Jack's unerring aim.

Despite the trouble Lafe had had with his gun, a yell of delight broke from him when he saw the results of their mutual shot.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed, leaping up in the boat. "You've brought down the goose, Jack, and there are no end of brant."

"I aimed for the goose all right with my first barrel," said Jack, more complacently.

"He's as dead as a smelt."

"I saw him keel over, Lafe, then I sent the other barrel into the rest of the flock."

"Let's gather them in," cried Lafe. "We have got to wring the necks of some of those fluttering fellows."

Jack readily complied and again they sent the light skiff out into the deeper water. It took them some little time to gather in all of the game, and when the last bird had been tossed onto the boat the heap began to look quite formidable.

"We shall have a good lug home," laughed Lafe.

"And a good meal off of what we lug," added Jack.

"You bet! More than one meal, too."

In his mind's eye Lafe already could see them plucked of their feathers and gracing a festive board.

"We'll now get under cover again," said Jack, after making a long survey of the more remote parts of the pond. "I don't see anything near here in our line, and we may have a long wait before getting another shot like the last one."

"The game is worth the waiting," declared Lafe, with another glance at the plump birds. "I'll row her back this time."

"All right," nodded Jack, surrendering the oars.

As he had predicted, it was a long wait before they got another shot, and then they bagged only two out of a trio of flying ducks.

"What time do you call it?" asked Lafe, as they returned to cover after taking in the last birds.

Jack glanced up at the sun.

"Eleven o'clock," said he; "or so near it there is no fun in it."

"'Bout time we fed, isn't it?" grinned Lafe, with a wistful glance at the lunch pouch.

"I was just thinking the same," laughed Jack.

"Well, thinking won't fatten us up much."

"We'll do better," said Jack. "We'll lay off a while and have lunch."

"That will hit me all right."

"We had breakfast quite early, and the exercise has whetted our appetites."

"Mine doesn't need any whetting. It never did."

"I guess that's right," smiled Jack, passing over a generous sandwich. "It is a good fault, however, and—hello! there's that sound again."

"Did you hear it before?" demanded Lafe, quickly.

"Sure."

"So did I, Jack, but I imagined you didn't notice it."

"I heard it each time after we fired our guns," said Jack, listening intently.

"There it goes again!" exclaimed Lafe, and he even quit munching to listen.

From the far distance there had come to their ears a long, melancholy sound, too faint to be easily located, yet one that was irresistibly thrilling with its dismal intonation.

"What do you make of it?" asked Lafe, staring at Jack's intent face.

"I can't make it out, that's just the trouble," replied Jack, with a mystified expression.

"Neither can I," said Lafe, resuming his eating.

"It sounded a little like somebody shouting for help," added Jack, after a moment and when the sound was not again heard.

"That's what I thought at first."

"Yet it might have been the howl of a dog, or of some wounded animal."

"It would be a mighty small dog, then, or else a long way off."

"I hardly think it was a dog."

"It sounded from considerable distance."

"Yes," nodded Jack. "It came from over that edge of the swamp, as near as I can locate it."

The mysterious sound was not immediately heard again, however, and the boys finished their lunch and prepared once more to get down to business.

"What time shall we start for home?" asked Lafe, as he recharged his gun.

"About four o'clock, I thought."

"That will suit me, Jack."

"We ought to have game enough by that time, and if we start by four we won't have to hurry to reach home before dusk."

"That's right, too," nodded Lafe. "I'd like to get just a few more cracks at these fellows. How would it do to slip a little further up the shore?"

"I don't think there would be anything in it," replied Jack, shaking his head. "We have a good blind here, and without it we might not be able to do anything."

"Mebbe not."

"A still line hooks the most fish, Lafe."

"But we are not fishing."

"The principle holds good in our case just the same. We can't gain anything by changing our position."

Lafe yielded readily, for he knew by experience that Jack was nearly always right.

In the course of another hour they bagged a few more ducks, and finally wounded one which, too badly injured to fly, fell into the pond and managed to flutter quite rapidly over the surface of the water, in a direction parallel with the edge of the pond on which the blind was located.

"I'm bound to have him," growled Lafe, who then was at the oars. "He cuts out quite a clip for a winged one, but I'm blessed if he escapes us now that we've hit him."

"Well, we'd better get him," laughed Jack, amused at Lafe's impatience. "We owe it to him at least to put him out of his misery."

"I'll put him in a comfortable place a little later," Lafe declared, rubbing his stomach while he turned to get his direction.

Then he bent to the oars again and sent the light skiff flying over the water.

The chase proved longer, however, than either he or Jack had anticipated. When they finally overhauled the duck, which Lafe put down and out with the blade of one of the oars, they were a strong half-mile up the shore, reckoned from the point where the duck blind was built.

"I wouldn't have believed that one duck could have caused us so much trouble," panted Lafe, while he rested after his exercise. "Whew! it's anything but cold now, Jack."

Jack Lightfoot made no answer.

He had dropped the dead duck to the bottom of the boat, and sat listening intently, as he had listened two hours before, with his gaze fixed upon the wooded shore some fifty yards away.

"Did you hear it, Lafe?" he presently asked, scarce above a whisper.

"No, I didn't hear anything," said Lafe, startled by the awed look on Jack's face, an unusual expression for him.

"The same sound—only nearer."

"Jerusalem beeswax! there it is again," gasped Lafe, as the doleful noise, still too faint to be accurately identified, fell upon their ears.

"Is it a cry for help?" asked Jack, in perplexity.

"It doesn't sound just like that to me, yet I'm blessed if I can make out what it is."

"Can it be a dog howling?"

"It doesn't sound like a dog, either," said Lafe. "It's more like—hark! there 'tis again."

Jack stood up in the skiff and again strained his ears.

The melancholy sound hung upon the stillness of the swamp for several moments, then died away to utter silence.

"That's mighty mysterious," said Jack, with brows knit. "I hate to go away and feel that I may have left somebody calling for help about here."

"That would be a little tough."

"If I was sure that some one is shouting, I'd try to discover——"

"I say!" interrupted Lafe, suddenly. "You don't suppose Prof. Sampson has got lost up here in the swamp, or mebbe broken a leg, do you?"

"Jimminy! I'd forgotten about him, Lafe," cried Jack, with face lighting. "It's barely possible that he may be in some kind of trouble."

"Gee whiz! but we'd stand ace high with him hereafter, in case we could help him out."

"That's a very practical way of looking at it," smiled Jack, not much impressed with so remote a motive for doing the elderly professor a service.

"Well, 'twould figure in the balance sheet, anyway," grinned Lafe.

"Hark! there's the noise again."

"Sampson had his little fox terrier with him, didn't he?"

"Yes, so Kennedy said last night."

"Gee! it might be the howl of that little dog," cried Lafe. "And the old man himself may be down and out."

"Lafe, I'm going to investigate it," Jack Lightfoot abruptly exclaimed. "I'm going to solve this swamp mystery, or lose a leg in the attempt."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SWAMP MYSTERY.

Having resolved to investigate the mysterious sound, Jack Lightfoot was not slow in acting upon his determination. The possibility that some person was in distress and calling for help, whether it should prove to be Prof. Sampson or not, was enough to arouse Jack's manly sympathy and send him in search of the sufferer.

Lafe Lampton also was of the same mind, and he caught up the oars again, crying quickly:

"I'm with you, Jack. What shall we do first?"

"We'll go ashore yonder and haul up the skiff," replied Jack. "Then we'll listen for the sound again and try to go to the spot from which it comes."

"We can hide the boat under those willows on the bank."

"That will be a good place, Lafe, and then we easily can locate her when we return."

"Shall I hit her up?"

"Yes."

Lafe bent to the oars again and quickly brought the

boat to the low bank. There both boys sprang out, parting the long willow branches which hung nearly to the water, and under which they quickly drew the skiff and made her fast to the protruding roots of one of the trees.

Jack stowed the oars under the thwarts, then gathered the dead game in a heap and remarked while he did so:

"We will leave things shipshape, Lafe, in case we don't come back here this afternoon. It's now after three o'clock, and there's no knowing where this expedition will take us."

"That's right, too," admitted Lafe. "Had we better take our guns along with us?"

"I think so."

"Me, too! We might run across Dillon again, and that black-eyed rooster in brown."

"Possibly."

"In which case the guns may tend to make them a little more respectful," Lafe dryly added. "If it hadn't been for them, Jack, I think they'd have kicked us this morning."

"Wasn't it over in this direction that Dillon said he lived?"

"Sure."

"His house must be out beyond the edge of the swamp, then," said Jack, sizing up the situation. "I don't think the upland on this side is very far away."

"Hark!" muttered Lafe. "There's that noise again."

Both stood and listened for a moment.

"It is over in that direction," said Jack, pointing to the west.

"That's where I located it."

"Come on, then. We'll make a start that way."

"Remember those tall pines over yonder," said Lafe.

"We can locate the skiff from them."

"A good landmark," nodded Jack. "Now we'll be off to see what that noise means."

With their guns under their arms the boys struck through the swamp in the direction mentioned, picking their way over the soggy ground and through the thick growth of shrubs and bushes, till they had covered several hundred yards.

Then the ground became harder, the way less diffi-

cult, and the background of loftier trees loomed up more plainly.

"We are getting to the edge of the swamp land," said Jack, halting for a moment to be sure he was right.

"Gee! but that was rough walking," declared Lafe, panting for breath.

"It's coming easier now."

"So I see."

"We'll work out this way till we reach the woodland, then listen again for—there it is, Lafe, now."

Now the doleful noise sounded a little more plainly, and Lafe quickly cried:

"We are nearer to it, Jack. I'm blessed if I don't think it is a dog."

"It did sound more like one," Lightfoot admitted. "Let's get a move on again. Perhaps the job may not prove as difficult as we think."

"Go ahead. I'm with you."

A walk of five minutes through the dry underbrush now brought them fairly into the woodland mentioned, and something like a hundred yards away they could discern indications of a narrow road making through the woods. Toward this they turned their steps, and Jack presently remarked:

"It's a road all right, Lafe, and must lead to some place."

"Mebbe it's a blind one."

"That's not likely, yet—hello! what's that thing?"

From above some low bushes several yards away, protruding only an inch or two above them, was a round yellowish object which had caught Jack's alert eyes. Closely followed by Lafe, he now hastened toward it and presently cried, quickly:

"It's the handle of a wicker basket."

"Not the professor's—yes, by thunder, it is!"

Jack had picked up the small covered basket, and both stared briefly at it with startled eyes.

"Are you sure it is, Lafe?"

"Dead sure, Jack. I've seen him carry it hundreds of times."

"If 'tis his——"

"See what's in it!"

Jack quickly raised the cover.

Limp and wilted in the bottom of the basket lay a handful of plants and ferns, positive evidence that the basket was, indeed, that of Prof. Jeremy Sampson, the Cranford tutor and botanist.

A momentary feeling of awe fell upon both of the boys, so startling was the discovery, and Jack presently remarked:

"Something serious must have happened to him, that's evident."

"Mebbe he only lost the basket," suggested Lafe.

"That theory might go, Lafe, if he hadn't been missing from home so late last night," replied Jack, quick to reason correctly.

"That's true, Jack."

"The two circumstances point to something more serious," added Jack. "Certainly we now must redouble our efforts to find him."

"Sure thing we must," cried Lafe. "Let's see if we can trace his footsteps from here, since he must have been here when he dropped the basket."

"It seems so," said Jack, peering eagerly about. "Here is a broken bush, Lafe, and yonder is another. It looks to me as if he had suddenly dropped the basket and started running."

"As if frightened by something?"

"Exactly."

"He must have gone in that direction, then," cried Lafe, noting the two bushes Jack had pointed out. "Let's follow it as far as we can find any signs like these."

"That's a good idea."

"Perhaps he ran foul of some wild animal, or saw some——"

"Here's another broken bush, Lafe," interrupted Lightfoot, who was striding quickly ahead. "And, look! yonder the ground is some torn up, as if there had been a struggle."

The spot now discovered by Jack was somewhat nearer the narrow woodland road, and was quite free from shrubbery and undergrowth.

Both boys hastened to the spot and fell to carefully studying the damp ground.

Here among the leaves and pine needles they discovered the deep prints of heavy boots, together with

numerous scrapings and indentations which plainly indicated that there had been a hand-to-hand conflict of no ordinary violence.

"There was a fight here, all right," declared Jack, with grim decisiveness.

"And a fight between men, not against any animal," added Lafe. "Look at the sizes and shapes of these footprints."

"There are three different sizes, Lafe," said Jack, studying the impression more closely. "These smallest ones must have been made by the feet of the professor. The others are larger and broader, and appear to have been made by heavy boots."

"Right you are, Jack, and this indicates that Sampson encountered two men, by whom he must have been assaulted, if not robbed and done away with."

"That would be horrible," muttered Jack, with a shudder. "One thing is sure, Lafe. We now must go to the bottom of the mystery."

"That's what, Jack, and I'm darned glad we brought along our guns."

"So am I," nodded Lightfoot, rising from the ground. "It looks to me as if the professor may have run foul of Dillon and that ruffian we saw with him this morning."

"By Jove, that's so! Do you know where Dillon's house is located?"

"Only that it is over in this section."

"Are there any other dwellings near it?"

"I think not, Lafe. If it's the one I have in mind, it is in a clearing on the west edge of the woods and is entirely isolated."

"Those two curs may have robbed the professor and then lugged him up to the house."

"That would be better than having killed him," said Jack, thoughtfully. "But we have no positive assurance that these prints were left by Dillon and his companion. To go to his house might not result in anything."

"That's true," Lafe dubiously admitted. "If we could manage to follow these prints, which appear to be entirely lost beyond this bit of ground, we might be able to trail him to some place, or discover where——"

"Hark! there's that howl again," interrupted Jack.

"By thunder! I have it, Lafe. It comes from Sampson's fox terrier. We know that he had the dog with him."

"I have heard that a dog will stay and howl above the grave of its master," said Lafe, with dismal forebodings. "I'll bet, if we find the professor at all, we shall find him under the sod."

"Dead or alive, Lafe, we must find him," Jack Lightfoot firmly declared. "There's but one thing to be done, that with which we started. We must follow that sound until we reach the spot from which it comes."

"I'm with you, Jack."

"Whether it leads us to a grave, or to something less dreadful, it's up to us to solve this mystery to rock bottom. So keep your gun handy, Lafe, and we'll go at it."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

The sound which Jack and Lafe had heard so frequently now appeared to come from beyond the narrow road upon which they had stumbled, and from a direction nearly at right angles with it.

On the opposite side of the road, however, there was a thick woodland and a rise of the hills, which offered no very promising reward to a search.

"There is nothing to be gained by following the road," Jack protested, when Lafe Lampton demurred somewhat over plunging into the woods.

"Mebbe not, Jack."

"The road will only take us away from the sound, instead of toward it. We must make a bee line for that noise, Lafe, wherever it leads us."

"All right," Lafe finally assented. "I'll go where you go, Jack."

So they plunged into the woods together, with guns ready for any emergency.

Again Jack's superior judgment proved to be right.

A laborious tramp of ten minutes, up hills and through thick underbrush, brought them to a less dense portion of the woods. It had proved to be only a wide belt of timber land, beyond which now could be seen a

broad sweep of the open country, and in the far distance the road that led toward Cranford.

Some little distance to the west, moreover, and on the very edge of the woods, Jack quickly discovered indications of a small clearing.

"If I'm not mistaken, Lafe," said he, while they halted to size up the situation, "yonder is where Dillon's house is located."

"In that place that looks like a clearing, Jack?"

"I think so."

"It seems to me that we shall be bucking up against bother, Jack, if we venture upon his territory," said Lafe, a bit doubtfully.

"I'm not yet sure that it is his place," replied Jack. "We can make a detour through the woods and approach it from the rear. Then we can make sure whether it is Dillon's house, and perhaps discover who's there."

"That's more like it," cried Lafe, nodding. "Lead the way and I'll follow you."

Again they struck out through the woods, taking a back track for a short distance, and then bore around on a course that would bring them back of the clearing.

As they came nearer they again heard the doleful sound previously noticed, now very distinctly.

"Gee whiz! there's no mistaking it now, Jack," muttered Lafe, when he heard it.

"It's the howl of a dog, all right."

"Sure as death and taxes."

"I think it must be——"

"Steady, Jack, not too fast! Yonder's the roof of a house."

"I see it," Lightfoot softly answered. "Come this way. We'll steal through these scrub oaks till we can get a square look at the place."

"That's the stuff."

"They'll conceal us all right, in case there's anybody about."

Dropping upon all fours and trailing their guns, both Jack and Lafe now crept under the low branches of the scrubby trees, till they had gained a position at the very edge of the woods at the back of the clearing.

In a part of it some fifty yards away stood a low

wooden house, the doors of which were closed, while off to one side was a small barn and shed. These, with a huge woodpile and a dilapidated buggy at the rear of the house, made up the chief features of this isolated habitation.

Beyond it, off in the distance, could be seen the open country, with the road to Cranford lying like a broad yellow belt across the adjoining fields of green and brown.

"There appears to be no one at home," muttered Jack, after they both had gazed for several moments.

"Is it Dillon's house?" asked Lafe, in a whisper.

"Yes."

"I don't see any signs of a dog."

Lafe hardly had made this remark, however, when the same dismal sound as before arose from the edge of the woods off to the left, and both boys instantly turned in that direction.

"There he is!" cried Jack, softly. "It is Sampson's fox terrier, as sure as you're alive."

"Yes, 'tis Toby all right," muttered Lafe. "But where's his master?"

The dog, a small white terrier, was seated just out of the woods and evidently as near the open ground as he dared. There, at almost regular intervals, he would throw up his head and emit one of those prolonged, melancholy howls which the boys had heard at times since early morning.

"The dog appears afraid of something, or somebody, yet there must be some reason for his hanging about this place," Lafe Lampton added, after a moment.

"I think I can guess the reason," said Jack, a bit grimly.

"What is it?"

"I believe that his master is confined in that house or barn, and the dog knows it."

"Jimminy crickets! that may be so."

"Furthermore, he evidently has been threatened by Dillon or that other chap, who possibly have attempted to shoot him, and he doesn't dare approach nearer the house."

"I'll bet that just hits it."

"Lafe," said Jack, suddenly; "we've got to get into that house, or at least have a look into it."

"Gee whiz! I can see our finish if Dillon, with that other guy, discovers us."

There was in Jack Lightfoot's eyes a look that spoke louder than words, however, and Lafe Lampton knew that he meant just what he had said.

"I'll go it, Jack, if you say so," he quickly added.

"It's certainly up to us, Lafe," Jack firmly answered. "We can't doubt that some ill has befallen Prof. Sampson, and the presence of his dog here, as well as the animal's actions, plainly seem to say the man is in that house, a prisoner there, if not dead."

"There is no getting around that reasoning," admitted Lafe.

"For us to turn back, then, and leave him helpless in the hands of such ruffians as we encountered this morning, would be to act the part of cowards, of curs with even less heart than yonder dog."

"That it would!" exclaimed Lafe, moved by Jack's manly words.

"Then we must do what becomes us."

"Say the word, Jack, and we'll raid the place with a rush."

And Lafe jerked his gun forward and dropped the stock under his arm, as if ready for business then and there.

But Jack briefly checked him, saying quickly:

"Hold on! There's a right and a wrong way to go at this, and we'll try to take the right one."

"What do you mean, Jack?"

"If we approach the house cautiously, or as if suspicious of something wrong in there, we shall at once invite trouble in case we are seen."

"That's true."

"On the other hand, Lafe, if we go boldly to the door and pretend that we are lost and wish to inquire our way, we may possibly discover what we wish to know, and without having awakened the distrust of any inmates of the house, providing it is occupied."

"The circumstances certainly warrant as much deception as that," growled Lafe, approvingly; "and the plan's a good one."

"I think it may serve our purpose," said Jack, decidedly.

"I'm ready when you are."

"Shall I do the talking, in case we find the house occupied?"

"Yes, if you like."

"Forward, then!"

And Jack Lightfoot, closely followed by Lafe, stepped out of the woods and strode across the clearing toward the house. Each carried his gun under his arm, and displayed neither fear nor suspicion.

The moment the dog saw them emerge from the woods, he emitted a longer howl than usual, but neither gave it any attention.

"Which door, Jack, front or back?" asked Lafe, as they drew nearer the house.

"The back one, Lafe," said Jack.

Without hesitation he approached the door and rapped smartly on one of the dingy panels.

The sound echoed dismal and hollow from within, but only the echo responded to his knock. Thrice he repeated this attempt to summon somebody to the door, but each time it proved futile.

"Either there are no persons at home, or they are lying low," whispered Jack, with a side glance at Lafe.

"That's evident," muttered Lafe.

"I'm going to take a chance that all hands are absent, Lafe, and try to get a look inside."

"I'm with you," said Lafe, boldly.

Rounding the house Jack peered through one of the side windows, but only the dismal interior of a dirty kitchen met his gaze.

"There is no one in there," he whispered to Lafe, at his elbow. "We will try a window of the front room."

Here they met with no greater results, in so far as discovering any inmate went; but as Jack turned about he felt a quick thrill upon seeing something moving some twenty yards away from the house. A second glance showed it to be the fox terrier, however, which now stood gazing at the boys much as if he recognized them, and with an indescribably wistful expression in his bright, intelligent eyes.

Jack dropped to one knee and cried, louder than he had spoken since approaching the house:

"Here, Toby! Come here, Toby!"

The dog, who was much accustomed to being petted by the Cranford schoolboys, now seemed to know that he had found friends. He needed no second call, but came leaping joyously about Jack Lightfoot, and fell to barking at the top of his lungs.

"Hush! hush!" cried Jack, quieting him with some difficulty. "You'll arouse everybody within forty miles of here. Lafe, this dog hasn't been fed since—hark! what's that, Lafe?"

The barking of the dog so near the house, together with the louder voice with which Jack had spoken, now had evoked a sound that sent a momentary chill through both of the dauntless boys.

It had appeared like a hollow groan, issuing from some quarter within the dismal house.

"Did you hear that?" asked Jack, staring at Lafe Lampton's startled countenance.

"Yes, sure I did!" exclaimed Lafe, under his breath.

"What was it?"

"It sounded like somebody groaning."

"That's what I thought."

"I'll bet the professor is in this house, and in mighty bad shape," declared Lafe.

"Then we must get in there, Lafe, even if we have to batter down a door," said Jack Lightfoot, firmly. "Stop a moment."

He had caught sight of a small cellar window in the foundation wall of the house, one of the dirty, impenetrable panes of which was partly broken out. At this window Jack now hastened to kneel, trying to peer into the depths of the cellar.

The interior was so dark that he could see nothing, however, yet he detected the foul, damp odor from within and almost immediately heard, as if he had been observed at the window by some person inside, the half-smothered noises of some one in distress and trying to make himself heard.

As Lafe drew nearer, Jack bent down to the broken pane and cried:

"Is that you, Prof. Sampson? Are you in this cellar?"

Instantly the noises were repeated, much louder than before, and with a significance that could not be mistaken.

CHAPTER IX.

JACK TO THE RESCUE.

"The professor is down there, Lafe, there's no doubt about that," exclaimed Jack Lightfoot, springing to his feet.

"It certainly sounded so," admitted Lafe, who also had heard the noises.

"He must be bound and gagged, for it's plain enough that he can't speak, but can make only those smothered sounds in answer."

"What's to be done, Jack?"

"Lafe, I'm going into this house, and into that cellar."

"Isn't it breaking and entering?" demurred Lafe, with some misgivings.

"I can't help it if it is," cried Jack. "The case warrants such action and I'm going to take it."

"I'm with you, then."

"Come this way," said Jack. "We'll first try the back door. If we can't open it we will force one of the windows."

Now hastening to the rear of the house, they found that the back door was secured within, and it resisted Jack Lightfoot's every vigorous attempt to open it.

"Hadn't we better try the front one?" asked Lafe, a bit excitedly now that he was fairly bent upon the war-rantable undertaking.

"No, I'm not going to delay for that," cried Jack. "If they really have the professor confined in here, these rascals probably have secured both doors."

"What are you going to do?"

"Smash a window," declared Jack, decidedly. "We'll take that end one."

"The sooner it's done, then, the better," cried Lafe. "Dillon and his ugly companion may show up at any moment."

"That's right, too," admitted Jack.

He waited only to glance sharply about the clearing and out over the open country. There was no person visible, but above the bushes which skirted a portion of the distant road to Cranford there was quite a cloud of dust arising, as if a team was passing over the highway.

Jack gave this no attention, however, but at once approached the window mentioned. With the butt of his gun he quickly broke one of the panes, enabling him to throw the catch inside.

"Hang on to your gun, Lafe, in case we have to put up a fight," he softly advised, as he raised the lower sash.

"You bet I will," Lafe muttered.

With a bound Jack Lightfoot sprang into the dismal kitchen, and Lafe quickly followed.

"I'll close the window," said he; "in case Dillon shows up."

"A wise precaution," nodded Jack. "Now to find the stairs leading to the cellar."

For several minutes they could not locate them. Then, in a dingy room adjoining the kitchen, Lafe Lampton discovered an iron ring in the floor.

"Here is a trapdoor, Jack," he cried, quickly. "This may open to the stairs."

Hastening to join him, Jack seized the ring and threw back the small section of floor. Through the square, dark opening rose the same foul odor of the cellar, and a flight of narrow wooden steps met the boys' gaze.

"You wait here, Lafe, and keep a lookout from the window," said Jack, after briefly peering down. "I'll go down these stairs and see what's in the cellar."

"Go ahead," nodded Lafe. "I'll sing out in case of danger."

Without a thought of fear, Jack Lightfoot placed his gun on the floor, then picked his way down the narrow, rickety steps.

For some moments, until his eyes became accustomed to the dim light, he could not discern anything, yet he heard again the half-smothered sounds he previously had noticed.

Groping his way in the direction of them he presently beheld a man seated in a common wooden chair, to which he was securely bound, hands and feet, and with his speech prevented by a gag tied fast in his mouth.

The man was, indeed, Prof. Jeremy Sampson, the Cranford school teacher.

Jack uttered a cry of indignation and whipped out his knife. With half a dozen slashes he cut the ropes binding the man's arms and limbs, then more gently removed the gag from his mouth.

Though cramped and quite weak from the severe treatment he had suffered, the relief he evidently felt upon being rescued gave the man strength to speak, and he at once cried, huskily:

"God bless you, my boy! Heaven must have heard my prayers and sent you to my aid."

"Give some of the credit to your faithful little dog," replied Jack. "Don't you know me, professor?"

"Dear me! Is it Jack Lightfoot?"

"The same, sir."

"I am so glad, so relieved," cried the man, while Jack chafed his swollen wrists. "You have done me a service, Jack, I never can repay."

"Don't speak of that, professor," said Jack, warmly. "Tell me how you came here, and how long you have been here."

"I have been here, a prisoner, since yesterday afternoon, in the power of thieves and ruffians," cried Prof. Sampson, momentarily gaining his strength. "Help me up the stairs and I then will tell you all. The air here is frightful."

"It is, for a fact, professor," said Jack, aiding him to rise and reach the stairs. "I wonder that you could have lived so long here."

"I feel as if I were only half alive," replied Sampson, as he climbed up to the room above. "Ah! a fresh breath is reviving. Dear me! here you are, also, Lampton."

"Yes, sir," bowed Lafe, startled by the unusually haggard look of the man's wan face. "Let me assist you, sir. Here, take this chair. I'm awful glad that we discovered and have been able to rescue you."

The elderly professor dropped into the chair brought him, and for several moments gazed gratefully from one to the other of the two boys, Jack now having come up from the cellar and closed the trap.

"You have done me a great service, a very great service, my boys," said he. "I shall not undertake to thank you at present, but will——"

"Will do us the greatest favor, professor, by forgetting all about it," interposed Jack, heartily. "We are more than glad to have been able to help you out of such a scrape, I assure you. Tell us how you got into it."

"Are those two men about here?"

"Not at present, sir."

"The rascals! the sinful scoundrels!" exclaimed Sampson, with an asperity that nearly made Lafe laugh outright. "I was seeking for some rare ferns in the woods below here, when I first discovered the knaves."

Lafe secretly hoped he did not discover the ferns.

"And what happened then, sir?" inquired Jack, with much interest.

"I saw the two rascals before they saw me," replied the professor. "I looked up from my search and discovered them burying something under a tall pine tree, about thirty feet from where I was standing."

"I see, sir," nodded Jack.

"My first thought, finding them thus engaged, was that they possibly had committed a murder and were now burying a human body," continued the professor.

"I hope it wasn't as bad as that, sir."

"Not quite as bad, Jack. For after watching them for a few moments, I saw that they were burying a lot of silver ware, which I immediately suspected that they had stolen."

"Silver ware?"

"Exactly."

"Eureka!" cried Jack Lightfoot, with a sudden triumphant bound. "I see it all now, Lafe. Those two fellows are the rascals who robbed Mr. Dillworthy's house."

"And they were hiding their plunder," cried Lafe.

"That's just the size of it."

"Has there been another robbery committed in Cranford?" inquired the professor, who, of course, had not heard of the crime.

"Yes, sir, the house of Mr. John Dillworthy, night before last," explained Jack. "We have learned from Kennedy, the constable, that there was a lot of silver ware stolen, but that there was no trace of the robbers."

"There now is a very reliable trace of them, thanks

to us, my boys," said Sampson, with threatening significance. "They were the two knaves who live in this house. I doubt not that they are the two who have been committing all of these burglaries. With you to help me, boys, we now will see that they are taken in custody."

"We'll help you, all right, professor," cried Jack. "But you haven't yet told us how you fell into their hands."

"That may be very quickly explained," was the reply. "While I stood looking at them, too amazed to move, one of them suddenly glanced up from his evil work and saw me. He instantly gave the alarm to his companion, whereupon both sprang up and started in my direction."

"Alarming you, of course."

"Naturally, Jack," bowed Sampson. "I dropped the little basket I was carrying and at once took to my heels. My only thought was to escape them and report what I had seen to the authorities. But the scoundrels overtook me before I could reach the road, even, and we then had a brief but very violent combat."

"We have seen signs of it, professor, and we also found the basket," remarked Jack.

"Ah! is that so?"

"We then knew that something serious must have happened to you."

"I found myself unable to cope with the two men, who finally overcame me," Sampson quickly went on. "They first tied me to a tree, then finished the work they were doing. After a brief consultation between themselves, I then was brought to this house, where I since have been confined, most of the time in the cellar and in the condition in which you found me."

"The rascals!" declared Jack. "Do you know what their intention has been in keeping you here?"

Prof. Sampson shook his head.

"I can only guess at what plans they have had in mind," said he. "They knew that, if they released me, I would report them to the police. I judge that they would have killed me sooner or later, or else have kept me a prisoner until they could make all their preparation for flight. I infer that they have been waiting to-day to learn whether any suspicions against them exist."

"I think that about hits the nail on the head, professor," said Jack. "We met the two scoundrels early this morning, and the inquiries they made show quite plainly that your theory is correct."

"I am quite sure of it, Jack."

"How are you feeling now, sir?"

"Much better, quite like myself again," cried Sampson, heartily. "I feel as if I could, with your help, handle both of those rascally robbers. Have you any idea where they have gone?"

"We haven't seen them since morning," replied Jack.

"They were here at noon, but soon went away again."

"That sounds as though they're likely to return a little later."

"True."

"Look out of the window, Lafe, and see if there are any signs of them."

Lafe Lampton hastened to comply, and almost immediately an excited cry broke from him.

"Gee whittaker! Look here, Jack! Here comes a wagon with Kennedy aboard, and half a score of the Cranford boys!"

CHAPTER X.

THE ARREST.

Jack Lightfoot uttered a shout and ran to the window, to which Prof. Sampson also hastened, now quite restored in the better atmosphere of the room.

Lafe Lampton was right in his announcement. Scarce a hundred yards away and rapidly approaching Dillon's house was a huge Cranford express wagon drawn by two horses, with the driver and Constable Kennedy on the seat, while in the body of the wagon were half a score of the Cranford boys.

Jack Lightfoot, with his usual keen insight, at once hit the nail on the head.

"It's a searching party out to find the professor," he cried. "They are heading for this house to see what they can learn from Dillon."

"Jerusalem beeswax!" shouted Lafe. "I now can see Dillon's finish all right, if he shows up here with that ugly-eyed pal of his."

"There's Brodie and Tom," said Jack, eagerly watching the approaching team. "Also Ned Skeen and Kirtland—oh, I say, professor, you see you're pretty well thought of, after all," he broke off to add, laughing.

Prof. Sampson turned gravely to him and took his hand, saying with some emotion:

"Yes, I see all that, Jack. But I see more plainly than all how good and brave a lad you are. I shall never forget the service you and Lafe have done me."

"Say no more about it, professor, I beg," replied Jack, modestly.

Lafe, however, hoped he would ease up on him on the plant business.

The cloud of dust the boys had seen a short time before had been occasioned by the approaching team, and before anything more could be said in the room the vehicle whirled up to the side of Dillon's house, and its inmates began to pile out.

Then Jack Lightfoot gave them all the surprise of their lives by opening the window, and drawing forward the professor in sight of all.

"Hello, Mr. Kennedy!" he shouted. "I guess you've brought the boys up to see what sort of game we found about Hickman's swamp. Behold, not exactly the game, but Prof. Jeremy Sampson!"

The amazement that filled his hearers could not be described. It held all of them speechless for several minutes, but Kennedy finally found his voice.

"Well, I'll be whipped, Jack Lightfoot, if you don't take the cake," he cried, striding nearer the window.

"By thunder!" muttered Kirtland, who was a little bit jealous of Jack. "It's mighty funny that Jack Lightfoot is always the one to turn these clever tricks."

Explanations were quickly made, however, for Jack foresaw that Dillon and his pal might return at any moment, and if they discovered the strangers at the house they would at once become alarmed and resort to flight.

"There is one thing that must be done before the crooks arrive, Mr. Kennedy," said he, when the entire situation had been outlined to all hands.

"What's that, Jack?" inquired the constable.

"The driver must take his team out of sight into

the woods, while the rest of us conceal ourselves here in the house to await Dillon's arrival."

"That's a good suggestion."

"If they show up a little later, as we expect, it then will be easy to arrest both of them," added Jack.

"I'll arrest them, all right, the rascals," said Kennedy, with grim significance.

Jack's suggestion was acted upon at once, however, and the driver presently disappeared with his team around a bend of the woodland road.

Then Kennedy and the boys all clambered into the window which Jack had broken, and proceeded to conceal themselves in various parts of the dismal little house.

"It now comes down only to a matter of waiting," said Jack; "and as it already is beginning to grow dusk I think we may not have very long to wait."

He and Lafe, together with the professor, hid in a closet in the dingy dining room, while Kennedy took for concealment a cupboard of good size in the kitchen.

As Jack Lightfoot had predicted, they had not long to wait.

For about five minutes absolute silence reigned in and about the house, and then the gruff voice of Dillon's pal was heard outside.

"There's that cussed dog ag'in, Bill," the boys heard him say. "If we're going to do away with the old covey in the cellar, we might as well shoot his dog, too, and send 'em along together."

"We'll go in and see how the old bloke's doing," growled Dillon, opening the door with a key and striding into the kitchen. "I don't much like cutting off his wind, but I don't see what else can be done."

"Nothing else can be done, Bill," snarled his companion, standing his gun in the corner and closing the kitchen door.

"Mebbe not, Jim."

"If we let him go he'll give away what he seen in the woods, and then it'll all be up, and the goose hangs high with us. They'll round us up for all the burglaries we've done, and find the swag just whar we buried it."

"I reckon you're right, Jim," said Dillon, as the two entered the dining room.

"Sure I'm right," growled Wagstaff. "Nothing else can be done."

It was at this point that Kennedy started in.

Slipping out of his concealment he uttered a low whistle, then stepped to the dining-room door, thus heading off the retreat of the rascals, and while he presented a revolver at the breast of both he cried, sternly:

"Oh, yes, there's something else you can do! You can throw up your hands, both of you scoundrels, and do it lively, too! If you don't I'll let daylight into you!"

At the same moment, in response to the whistle, Jack, Lafe and the professor sprang out of the closet, while the Cranford boys came pouring through the adjoining entry.

Though they turned ghastly with dismay and consternation, both Dillon and Wagstaff saw that they were helplessly cornered, and they grimly threw up the sponge.

Inside of two minutes Kennedy had them both in handcuffs, and that night they occupied a cell in the Cranford jail.

The departure to town was delayed only a short time, for Jack and Lafe to return to their skiff for the game they had shot, and then all hands, the two burglars included, piled into the wagon and were driven to Cranford.

There quite an ovation was accorded Jack Lightfoot and Lafe for the feat they had performed when seeking only a day's sport, and one and all conceded that, of all the game, that secured at Dillon's house was by long odds the most creditable and profitable.

Jack Lightfoot bore his honors with becoming modesty, however, as he invariably did.

THE END.

This little adventure of the swamp was not the only excitement that came Jack's way during those early winter days when there was a threat of snow in the air. You will find more of the same sort in the next issue of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY, No. 45, entitled "Jack Lightfoot's Luck; or, Glorious Days of Sport Ahead." Out next week.

HOW TO DO THINGS

By AN OLD ATHLETE.

Timely essays and hints upon various athletic sports and pastimes, in which our boys are usually deeply interested, and told in a way that may be easily understood. Instructive articles may be found in back numbers of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY, as follows: No. 31, "How to Make a Cheap Skiff." No. 32, "Archery." No. 33, "Cross-Country Running." No. 34, "The Game of Lacrosse." No. 35, "The Boy With a Hobby for Collecting." No. 36, "Football, and How to Play It." No. 37, "A Practice Game." No. 38, "How to Play Football—Training." No. 39, "The Men in the Line." No. 40, "The Men Behind." No. 41, "Signal Systems." No. 42, "Team Play." No. 43, "The End of the Season."

A GYMNASIUM WITHOUT APPARATUS.

I.

At a time when people are generally interested in everything pertaining to physical culture, new books are appearing on the various branches of the subject, and all the gymnasiums of the country are crowded daily with old men as well as young men, it is unnecessary to speak of the benefits to be derived from exercise. Everybody knows the value of moderate daily exercise, frequent bathing and careful dieting, to preserve one's health and prolong his life. A great many young men, while recognizing the need of exercise, and desiring to begin a course of training of some kind, are at a loss as to just how they should commence.

Gymnasiums are too expensive for a great many who would like very much to attend them, while numbers of youths and boys find, on account of their working hours, that it is entirely out of the question for them to think of such a thing. They have the desire to build up a strong, healthy body, but do not possess the time or means to carry out their design when depending upon elaborate apparatus and a physical director to obtain the best results. Fortunately for most of us, these requirements are not absolutely necessary for our physical development. On the other hand, there are many cases wherein light exercise without apparatus does the most good. It is the use of this means by which one is to gain health and strength that has been made the subject for discussion this week in "How to Do Things."

The United States Army long ago recognized the value of a few simple exercises not requiring apparatus of any kind, which the soldier could practice in the field, in the barracks—in fact, anywhere and at any time, without being dependent upon the paraphernalia of the gymnasium.

As a result, the soldier need never grow stale or have any excuse for slighting his exercises because at the time he might be quite a distance from the post gymnasium. As all the apparatus he needs consists of his arms and legs, he can hardly say, when he feels like neglecting his exercises, that the means of training has been left behind at his last stopping place.

The United States Army exercises are to-day the basis of all methods of instruction for the development of muscular power without the use of any appliances whatsoever. Generations of young men who have never seen the inside of a gymnasium have practiced the few simple rules laid down by Uncle Sam for his soldier boys, and reached a wonderful degree of physical perfection.

These simple exercises are very convenient for the schoolboy and the young man who have but little time for any kind of training. Ten minutes in the morning after getting up, and fifteen minutes before going to bed, covers all the time necessary to be devoted to the practice of the few rules explained in the following paragraphs, and to enable anyone who will closely follow the instructions to put his body in a healthful condition. If you keep up the work faithfully for six months you will notice a marked improvement, even in that short period.

Before beginning the regular "setting-up exercises," as they are called, you should practice deep breathing a few minutes to clear out the lungs. There is nothing so good as this to bring one out of that heavy, loggy state which everyone experiences for a few moments when jumping out of bed quickly after being sound asleep. And first of all, be sure that there is plenty of fresh air circulating in your room before beginning any form of exercise.

Throw all the windows wide open, but be sure that you do not stand in a draught while going through the exercises. Place yourself in an erect position, the heels close together and the toes forming an angle of sixty degrees. Keep the knees straight, but do not allow them to assume a stiff position that will prevent a free movement of the body. Let the upper part of the body set lightly on the hips, and inclined a little forward. The shoulders should be square and fall equally from the sides. Straighten the arms along the thighs, and let the palms of the hands rest against the legs. Hold the head back, with the chin in, so that the eyes will look straight ahead. Fasten the gaze upon the juncture of the ceiling and the wall of the room.

Now bend the body from the waist until the tips of the fingers touch the knees, at the same time allowing the shoulders to fall forward and the chest to contract. When this position has been assumed, draw in the breath very slowly through the nose. Begin to draw the body up to an erect position, throwing the shoulders and the chest out.

When the original position has been regained, hold the breath a second or two, and then let it out slowly through the mouth.

This first breath of fresh air will act as an exhilarating tonic, and make you feel lively. By the time you have completed this exercise the blood will be coursing through your veins, and you will be ready for the next series of movements.

The first is the arm exercise. Take the position as described above and as seen in Fig. 1. Have the shoulders thrown well back and raise the arms until they extend out straight from the body. Raise the arms up toward the head and let the tips of the fingers touch directly above it; gradually lower them till they strike the top of the head, the backs of the hands touching all the time. Be careful to have the elbows well pressed back while doing this, and the thumbs pointing to the rear during the descent of the hands. Extend the arms to their full length over the head with a gradual motion, and then describe a circular swing, bringing the arms to their original position by your side. Repeat this exercise a few times and then take up the second one.

Before going on with a new exercise, prepare for it

(Continued on page 30.)

A CHAT WITH YOU

Under this general head we purpose each week to sit around the camp fire, and have a heart-to-heart talk with those of our young readers who care to gather there, answering such letters as may reach us asking for information with regard to various healthy sports, both indoor and out. We should also be glad to hear what you think of the leading characters in your favorite publication. It is the editor's desire to make this department one that will be eagerly read from week to week by every admirer of the Jack Lightfoot stories, and prove to be of valuable assistance in building up manly, healthy Sons of America. All letters received will be answered immediately, but may not appear in print under five weeks, owing to the fact that the publication must go to press far in advance of the date of issue. Those who favor us with correspondence will please bear this in mind, and exercise a little patience.

THE EDITOR.

I have not written before to say how I like your publication because several times when I had a question I wanted to put to you, some one else got in ahead of me, so that I read the answer in the Chat columns. There was a little talk about a shotgun, for instance—that covered my case to a dot, because I've wanted to get one for a long time, and have been saving up with that idea, but my sister has always been opposed to the idea. I've got the gun, a good one, and I mean to use it as carefully as any wise old hunter. If it hadn't been for the advice you gave, I guess I'd have been tempted to buy a cheap one, and perhaps been sorry. So it has been in three matters. I read the letters now before I dip into the story, and I'm not the only one given to that trick, I should judge, from the interest shown in that department. Would you recommend any particular house in buying athletic goods? I purchased my gun through a friend who is employed in Spalding's. I fancy they are as reliable a firm as any. With best regards for Maurice Stevens and the publishers,

WALTER J. CODDING.

East Orange, N. J.

The advice given with regard to choosing a gun was intended for boys in general, and we are pleased to know you had the good sense to take it to yourself. What you say about us in such pleasant words we fully appreciate. The house you mention stands at the top with regard to reliability—none better. We have known them a long time, and always cheerfully recommend their material as capable of standing the test; which, of course, does not mean that there may not be others just as reliable.

An article you had lately in your department called "How To Do Things," was very interesting to me, because I've always had a mania for collecting. This article was called "The Boy with a Hobby for Collecting." Of course, like nearly all boys, I've always gathered stamps, and for a while took considerable interest in that, but in time it died out. Not so with the collecting of eggs. I have a very fine lot now, so I'm told by those who surely ought to know, and it makes me proud to hear them say so. For that collection represents a tremendous amount of energy. Many of the specimens could tell a pretty good story if they were able to talk, and when I handle them I can see once more a boy of about my size hanging to the face of a cliff, or swaying in the top of a big forest tree, with perhaps an angry hawk making things lively. I think a fellow enjoys having a collection that has cost him many a long tramp and hard climb, more than one that was given to him as a present. I hope you have some more articles after that order in your weekly. The stories are fine—none better at ten times the price. I expect to read ALL-SPORTS for years to come. I don't think I'll ever be too old to enjoy stories of outdoor life. Sometime, perhaps, I may write you some of my adventures while collecting.

RUFUS G. SMITH.

Helena, Ark.

Thank you, Rufus, for such an entertaining letter. We feel sure that many other lads with a love for collecting must have

shared in your enjoyment. As to your writing again, do so whenever you feel the spirit move.

I have been a reader of your weekly from the first number, so you can understand from that how much I like it. Sometimes I believe I'd sooner do without my dinner than miss ALL-SPORTS. I read every word in it from cover to cover, and sigh for more. Noticing the good advice you are constantly giving young fellows, I some time ago cut out cigarette smoking and began a systematic course of training. I feel so much better in every way because of it that I want to thank you from my heart. I have gained more than an inch in chest measurement, walk with a vigorous step, my eyes are clear and my skin healthy looking. My mother, whom I love very much, has several times told me how glad it made her to have me quit cigarettes. That set me thinking. You see, it gave me such a thrill when she told me that I began to realize how I had been sliding down hill, and the pull up didn't come any too soon, I guess. I owe much to your advice, and I want you to believe that I'll speak a good word for ALL-SPORTS wherever I go. Such stories should interest nearly every boy who has any red blood in him.

Zanesville, Ohio.

J. E. S.

Your experience is only that of thousands, but, unfortunately, few of them carry out their resolution to give up an evil habit. You are to be congratulated, and we feel that the love that shone from your mother's eyes when she told you how happy you had made her, must have been the keenest kind of satisfaction to you.

Your little ALL-SPORTS is true to the name. You seem to cover the field pretty well. And say, the stories are good enough to suit me, all right. I'm a great admirer of reliable old Life. He is the pick of the whole bunch, according to my way of thinking, and I guess I'm only saying what a lot of fellows believe. Everybody likes Life, because he's so natural, you know, and don't put on any airs or strut around when he knocks in a home run with Old Wagon Tongue and wins the game. He just feels hungry, and makes another home run for supper. And then again, Life is the goods when it comes to trouble. Many a time he's stood back of Jack and carried him through just because he was fearless and a good strong hitter. Life is the best character Mr. Stevens ever gave us, and we can't see too much of him. I wish there was a Southern boy in the story. Tell Mr. Stevens he has a host of friends and admirers down here in Dixie, and we don't feel as if we're treated just right in not having a representative in the story. Perhaps later on the talented author will get good and introduce a boy from the land of sunshine and cotton. Well, here's where I must shut up shop, or else never see this letter printed.

Charleston, S. C.

ROB G. ARKELL.

You are quite right in saying that Life is popular among the boys—just as he seems to be with the young people of Cranford. A frank, genial nature such as he possesses always makes a host of friends. The author may later on see fit to grant your request, which we deem reasonable enough.

Please don't think I'm writing this just to see my name in print, or to be on the band wagon with all the fellows who are barking the praises of ALL-SPORTS. The fact is, I feel it a duty to let you know how much I like the little magazine. I call it that because it comes to me every week just stored chock full of good things. I guess there never is a line from cover to cover that I miss, and my back numbers are getting pretty shabby from being looked over so much. Yes, more than that, I'm saving my nickels and dimes with the intention of ordering a complete file of the first twenty-six numbers and having them bound. Perhaps you'll say I'm a pretty good friend of ALL-SPORTS. Well, I am, and I never let a chance to sing its praises get away from me. Already I've influenced two boys who were

reading other libraries of blood-curdling adventure to swing around and buy the *Lightfoot* weekly. Both of them sing its praises just as loud as yours truly now. Well, I feel better now. Nothing like letting off a little steam sometimes. I just wanted to stand up and be counted as one of the ALL-SPORTS family. May it keep on increasing until Jack has half a million admirers over our whole land.

CHARLES P. TAFT.

Milwaukee, Wis.

If we were running an honor roll, your name would, of a certainty, grace the very top, Charles. We thank you for your words of praise. They have no uncertain ring, and stamp you as a warm friend of Jack *Lightfoot* beyond a doubt.

I have read ALL-SPORTS from No. 1 up, and I think it is just as good as the *Tip Top*. I like Jack, Tom, Lafe, Brodie, Phil, Nellie, Kate, Rex and "Polly" best. I wish, in your "How To Do Things," you would show us how to bind our ALL-SPORTS, as they get torn very easily when they are single. My measurements are: Age, 16 years; weight, 117 pounds; height, 5 feet 3 inches; neck, 13 inches; chest, normal, 31 inches; expanded, 33 inches; arms, normal, 10 inches; wrists, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches; waist, 26 inches; thighs, $18\frac{1}{2}$ inches; calves, 13 inches; ankles, 8 inches. What are my weak and good points? I remain,

Mankato, Minn.

O. A. B.

Fasten the numbers together inside the covers of a book which is useless for any other purpose; or, if you can afford it, buy a ready-made binder. This will keep them in good shape. You are a bit heavy for your height, but your chest is not quite in proportion. You could stand another inch and a half. Try some of the exercises recommended for it in the books on athletics.

Two months or six weeks ago I wrote my first letter to the Chat. My measurements then were: Age, 16 years; height, 5 feet $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches; weight, 127 pounds; chest, normal, 32 inches; expanded, 35 inches; reach, $67\frac{1}{4}$ inches; waist, 28 inches; thighs, 20 inches; calf, $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches; neck, 14 inches; biceps, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Now my measurements are: Age, 16 years 5 weeks; height, 5 feet 7 inches; weight, 132 pounds; chest, normal, 33 inches; expanded, 37 inches; reach, 69 inches; waist, $27\frac{1}{2}$ inches; thighs, $20\frac{1}{2}$ inches; calf, 13 inches; neck, $14\frac{1}{4}$ inches; biceps, $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches. I think there is a big improvement, even if I say so myself. Isn't there? I can punch the bag, with both hands, six hundred and forty times in one and one-half minutes, four hundred and fifty-six in one minute, two hundred and fifty-six in one-half minute, one hundred and thirty-eight in one-quarter minute. How is this? I can stand and jump eight feet four inches. I have read every number of ALL-SPORTS, and they are A1. I hope Mr. Stevens will introduce plenty of winter sports. Will you please recommend exercises for filling out hollows around the collar bone? Hoping this escapes the wastebasket, you will know me as

"NOTHING."

Terre Haute, Ind.

Well, you have done splendidly, beyond a doubt, and we can only say that if you keep on increasing in weight at the rate of five pounds in six weeks you will very shortly be unable to find any hollows such as you mention. Let us hear from you again in a few months.

As I have been a constant reader of the ALL-SPORTS LIBRARY since they began, I would say it is one of the best books I ever read. I like Jack and all his friends, and hope some day Phil Kirtland will be one of Jack's best friends. I have just read No. 34, and I think it was a great surprise when Lily Livingston gave them the parrot. I hope the football stories come next, and that they are as good as the baseball stories were. Hoping this will not take up too much space, I will close, with good luck to Mr. Stevens and the Winner Library Company,

Lawrence, Mass.

OTTO TEUBER.

By this time you will have read the entertaining football stories, which, we hope, have pleased you quite as well as the baseball series. Never fear but that Jack and the Cranford boys will keep the ball rolling all winter. There are many enjoyable things that the author has been holding in reserve and is now ready to spring upon his audience.

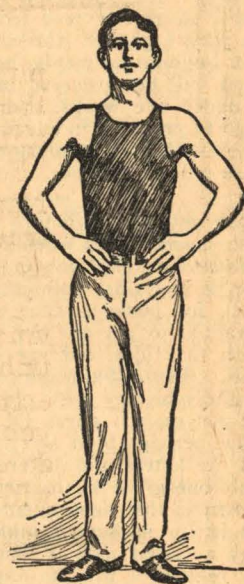
("How to do Things")—Continued from page 28.

by assuming the position already described for deep breathing. See Fig. 1.

Raise the arms horizontally as in the first exercise, and swing them to the front of the body so that the palms will touch. The heels should rest squarely on the ground. Throw the arms behind you, allowing them to drop slightly downward, at the same time raise your body on the toes. Bring the arms in front of you again with a quick movement, so that the hands will resound with a



(FIG. 1)



(FIG. 2)

SECOND EXERCISE.

sharp slap. Continue this exercise till you can touch the backs of your hands. It is recommended as being particularly good for enlarging the chest and increasing the lung power. Should you practice this regularly five minutes in the morning and again at night for one year, the development you would attain would be astonishing. We know of a young man who practiced this exercise faithfully for that period, never losing a day, in conjunction with other exercises, and enlarged his chest three inches. Of course he observed all the laws of health during his course of training, and did not permit himself to indulge in any harmful practice, such as smoking, for instance.

THIRD EXERCISE.

Raise the arms from the sides and hold them out straight, the same is in the first exercise; describe a circle upward and backward, but do not allow the arms to pass in front of an imaginary line running across the chest. Work the shoulders so that it seems as if you are "grinding" them in the sockets. This will strengthen the muscles about the shoulder blades.

FOURTH EXERCISE.

This, like the rest, is an arm exercise. Begin by placing the tips of the fingers on the top of the shoulders, taking pains to keep the upper part of the arm, from the elbow to the shoulder, in a horizontal position. Bring the elbows as far front as possible; then force them back as far as you can.

(This paper will be concluded next week.)

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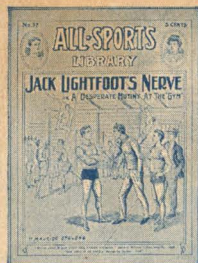
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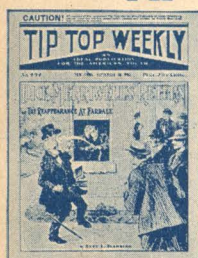
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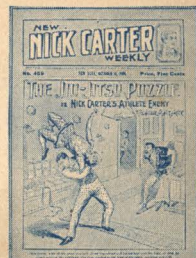
TIP TOP WEEKLY



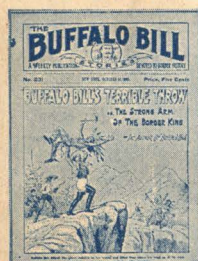
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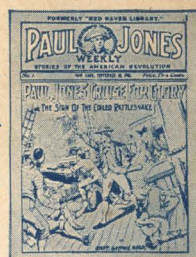
BUFFALO BILL STORIES



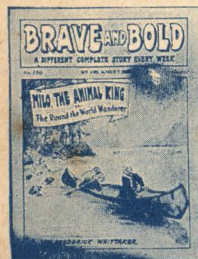
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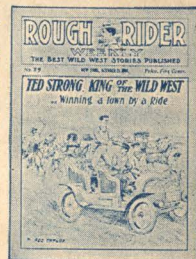
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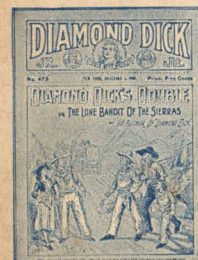
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